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**LATINA SUPERINTENDENTS IN TEXAS:
DEVELOPING LEADERS IN A CLIMATE OF CHANGE**

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**LATINA SUPERINTENDENTS IN TEXAS:
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by

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Treatise

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2017

Dedication

This accomplishment is always something that I have strived to complete. It was always a long shot for me to even be accepted into this distinguished group of educators at the University of Texas. The story I was telling myself coming out of a small charter school in San Antonio was full of self-doubt. It's the same story women continue to tell themselves when the envelope needs to be pushed. When I was a little girl in the first grade, my older sister Melanie asked me if I "wanted to be good for my age or just good?" She yelled at me before I was able to answer and said, "You just want to be good!" In this context, I have just wanted to always be good regardless of my ethnicity or gender. This program has equipped me to be just that. The people that I have encountered along the way have shown me that limitless potential lies within me – and it lies within each and every one of us.

First and foremost I must acknowledge my parents, who raised three daughters into strong, independent women. Their focus on education allowed us to view college as a stairway to a better life. My father, who grew up in the border town of Del Rio, served in the army in order to access the GI Bill to get an education. My mother was forced to work at a young age to put her younger brothers through private schooling on the west side of San Antonio. As two social workers, they worked tirelessly to ensure we never had to question our path to education and never question if, but when, we were going to college. Needless to say, this was not the norm in my community.

To my older sisters, who pushed me to be better and lit the competitive spirit within me, it is my hope that my nieces and nephews can be proud of their aunt and know the way is

paved for them. My extended family to include my in-laws, I am so thankful for all the help you provided to pick up my children, get them to school, ballgames, and plays. My three children Isabella, Michael Jr., and Lola are my everything and the reason I persevere every day. Isabella, as my oldest daughter, my hope is that you will grow up knowing anything is possible and realize that I gave my all to be the best role model I could be for you. In a world filled with misleading messages, especially surrounding young women, I want you to lead with your heart and always remember to give back to your community. Michael Jr., my sweet boy with a poet's soul, you are destined for greatness and I want to thank you for all of the sweet notes you wrote to mommy along the way, inspiring me to keep going when I felt like I wanted to give up. My Lola, the sassiest, strongest girl I know--- I know you will have no problem dominating this world.

When I think of who I want to be, you have that essence about you already.

I want to thank my family for sacrificing vacations and much of our free time so that I can further my education. Michael, my husband, who has leaned in and has cheered me on along the way--not only did you push me to believe that I could do this, you provided so much support to get it done. You knew how important this was to me and despite all of the time this took out of our lives, you filled in whenever I couldn't be present. This is our accomplishment and I share this with you.

Finally, as a mother of three Latino children it is my hope that my children know who they are culturally and are proud of their heritage. I want my girls to be proud, strong Latina women and my son to speak fluent Spanish, never forgetting who they are. I want them all to realize the beauty in their culture instead of running away from it. More importantly, it is my wish that they are not hindered or oppressed because of their identity, but stand proud and affirmed in who they are.

I have a tremendous amount of passion surrounding this topic and have spent all of my adult life working with students to provide them with an education to better themselves from an educational standpoint. My goal was to produce an innovative study that could both yield results and help women of color as we aim to improve school districts, traditional and charter, and student outcomes by unveiling the challenging the institutions and suppressive practices that have been in place in schools for far too long. Therefore, I believe it is this reflection on my identity, experience, and ownership that affords me with great insight that will strengthen the study.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge a group of people I admire and appreciate, whom I had the pleasure of meeting along this journey. Cohort 25 could not have been filled with a more supportive bunch. My carpool buddy Angela spent many early mornings and late nights with me on the road to and from Austin on I-35. Dr. Bukoski is my angel who guided me through the process of the treatise. She is an example of a fierce female and when I grow up I want to be just like her. I would like to thank Dr. Jabbar and Dr. Saenz whose unique expertise added a unique perspective and provided the invaluable feedback that greatly enhanced this study. Dr. Pringle talked me off a ledge a few times and I am so thankful our paths have crossed. Not only did you teach us lessons on the superintendency, but you made each class feel like a second home. Last, but not least, Dr. Olivarez – thank you for your guidance and mentorship. I am so honored to have learned from you and to call you my professor. May I always make you proud as I “charge on” in my career.

LATINA SUPERINTENDENTS IN TEXAS: DEVELOPING LEADERS IN A CLIMATE OF CHANGE

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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There are several studies on the school superintendent and the job has evolved since its early inception in the 1800s. However, the role of the district leader is now quite expansive and complex. With the exception of the era of the 1920s, white males have filled this highly stratified position. Yet, as our population has become increasingly majority minority with no change in the make-up of the position. This is especially true for Latinas aspiring to the position. While there is no shortage of Latinas in the pipeline, there is a concrete ceiling that has yet to be regularly penetrated for this group of women. The lack of mentorships combined with the hefty responsibilities of the job make it even more challenging to break into the role. Today's technological advances, academic complicated accountability measures, societal discord, and the political forces at work in school districts make the school leader even more difficult. This makes preparation for the role even more pertinent, yet, policy changes are making the path to this position more accessible for non-traditional leaders. The proliferation of charter schools makes this ascension even more feasible for candidates with little to no public schooling experience. While this may seem promising for a nontraditional candidate such as Latinas, this opening into the role has the potential to make the ascent even more challenging. Not only has the legislative agenda expanded the number of charter schools that can open in the state, the educational governing body of Texas has begun to relax the standard for principals and superintendents to exclude prior requirement that included teaching and principalship experience.

The literature describes the generalized challenges of the superintendency and emerging studies on gender and ethnicity. The research is also rich with studies regarding the importance of mentorship as a component of success for aspiring school district leaders. However, the literature lacks qualitative research studies focusing on those few Latinas who have managed to have ascended to the superintendency, particularly amidst the background of policy changes in Texas. Even more elusive in the literature, is leadership associated with the burgeoning charter school industry.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Latina superintendents are virtually non-existent in large urban Texas school districts. In a state consisting of more than 1,200 school districts, Latina superintendents are the district leaders in nine traditional public school districts and eight are leaders in charter schools as the chief executive officer (CEO), according to the latest public education information management system data in 2014-2015 (The Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2014). Studies have focused on gender inequities in leadership in the context of the school environment (Blount, 1998; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Martin, 2011). However, the superintendency, in particular, is referred to as a gender-stratified position where men are 40 times more likely than women to advance from teaching to a top leadership position (Glass, Bjork, & Brenner, 2000).

This data is problematic given the shifting demographics in Texas and the United States. On the whole, Latina/os numbers in this country are increasing at a faster rate than the non-Hispanic White population and make-up the second largest population in the state of Texas, with 37.6% persons identified as being of Hispanic descent. Hispanics also account for 65% of the state's population growth since 2000 (US Census Bureau, 2010). This translates to an increase of a large number of Hispanic-classified students in our Texas schools, who currently consist of 52% of our students in 2014-2015 as reported by the Texas Academic Performance Report published annually by the Texas Education Agency (TAPR, 2015). Additionally, female teachers comprise 76.5% of the teaching staff in Texas schools with 25.6% of teachers identifying as Hispanic; however, only

23% of school superintendents in the state are female (The Texas Education Agency, 2015). In light of this disproportionality that exists within our educational system between the top and bottom rungs of the workforce, the proposed qualitative study will focus on the individual experiences of the ascension of Latina school superintendents and charter school CEOs as related to the acquisition of the superintendent competencies, preparation, and mentorship in the state of Texas to potentially inform the changes in policy for this underrepresented group.

As leadership requirements become less stringent and promote the non-traditional leader, it would seem as if these modifications in policy could potentially open the door for change and be a positive addition for Latina leaders in the state. Yet, these new policies promote the replacement of a traditionally prepared male candidate for an experienced business-oriented male candidate. There is an elimination of the teaching requirement found in the new policies and an application that substitutes managerial experience for school leadership, asking explicit questions regarding budgeting and finance. These factors have prioritized the managerial functions of the superintendency over the instructional competencies, making it more difficult for the majority female teaching corps to rise into the leadership ranks.

The purpose of this study is to understand the phenomenon of Latinas ascending into the superintendency by studying the experiences of Latina superintendents and chief operating officers of school districts – traditional and charter – in Texas. This study will reveal new understandings of Latinas as superintendents and provide recommendations for how aspiring candidates can become viable options for a school district's top job. In

charter school organizations, the superintendent is substituted by leaders termed as chief executive officers, school leaders, and/or school directors due to what were once vastly different requirements. The contrasting preparation and experiences for these district leaders must be considered for aspiring Latina candidates in both the traditional and charter sectors. This study will be conducted within the context of changing policy in the state concerning the increase in number of charter schools.

Furthermore, the relatively new field of women in school leadership has begun to examine the implications of the proverbial glass ceiling to take on issues of workforce equity and to examine the unique challenges women face in educational leadership as well as the new field of teacher leadership (Martin, 2011). However, the literature fails to concentrate on the uniqueness of the Latina experience. Moreover, there is even less research on the increasingly popular charter school sector and the leadership of this similar, yet more business-like, model of schooling. There is still much to be gained from the understudied and outnumbered group of Latina superintendents and CEOs; therefore, I hope to derive insight into the experiences of Latina superintendents to aid aspiring Latina school administrators in both sectors of school leadership. This study is needed to capture the totality of the Latina superintendent experience and contribute to the existing body of literature as well as provide implications for solutions to the inequities and opportunities for future preparation surrounding access to the school district leader position in the state.

Demographics of Superintendents in Texas

There are 13,728 public school districts in the United States (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Male superintendents comprise 75.9% of school districts nationwide while 24.1% are led by females (Kowalski, McCord et al., 2011). In Texas, there are 1,101 public school superintendents listed on the 2014-2015 personnel report (Texas PK-16 Public Education Information Resource, 2015). Out of the 1,101 school leaders captured in this report, 853 (77%) male superintendents and 248 (23%) female superintendents lead public schools across the state with 122 (11%) identified as Hispanic/Latino (Texas PK-16 Public Education Information Resource, 2015). Within this percentage of Latino superintendents, Latinas occupy nine traditional superintendent positions. Additionally, there are eight Latina charter school CEOs out of the 215 capacity of charter districts in the state (TEA, 2016).

Charter School Superintendency/CEO

It is important to understand the idiosyncrasies of charter schools in Texas given the use of context in this study. Charter Schools in Texas are free public schools designed to provide an alternate choice in public education. These schools were authorized by the Texas legislature in 1995 through the development of a written “charter” granted by the state board of education, as either a home-rule school district charter, a campus or campus program charter, or an open-enrollment charter with variations in mission and model (TEC §12.002). There is increased autonomy and flexibility inherent in charters but the standard for accountability is aligned with expected state standards to include state assessment requirements for all public school districts

receiving state and federal funds. The 84th legislative session lifted the cap of 215 charter schools in Texas to allow a gradual expansion of open-enrollment charters each year until the total number of open-enrollment charters districts to reach 305 beginning September 1, 2019 (TEC §12.101). Texas Education Code does not require charter leaders to hold a superintendency certification, only mandating a baccalaureate degree for open enrollment charter school principals and teachers (TEC §12.129). School boards who are appointed in the charter school organizations are considered governmental boards per Chapters 551 and 552 of Governmental Code.

Superintendent Waiver

In the 2015 in the 84th Legislative Session in Texas, Senate Bill 168 allowed the commissioner of education¹ in Texas to waive the superintendent certificate if requested by the district (TASA, 2015). The State Board of Education (SBEC) has also currently held public meetings to waive the superintendent certification requirement for traditional school districts as a result of the proposed amendment to chapter 242 of the Texas Administrative Code and has dropped the teaching experience prerequisite from the superintendent requirement. In response to this amendment, the Texas Association of School Boards urged the state board of education to accept the rule change in order to expand the pool of quality superintendent applicants, citing the topic as an issue of local control and accountability (Collier, 2015).

¹ The new state commissioner, Michael Morath, holds a business degree and as a former Dallas ISD board member designed the movement to convert the district into a home-rule charter school.

Proponents of the rule change rejected the notion that superintendents should have teaching experience, stating the similarities in job functions to CEOs. State educator certification board members termed this as a pathway for school districts to “hire smart business leaders who may improve financial efficiency” (Collier, 2015). This privatization movement dates back to the 1980s as a result of intense public scrutiny by the business and political sectors (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). Nationally, nine states no longer require superintendents to possess a license and, among the remaining 41 states, 21 have provisions for issuing waivers or emergency certificates to include Texas. Moreover, 15 states allow or sanction alternative routes to licensure (alternatives to university-based study).

Leadership Dimensions

Our vision of leadership often transcends the educational arena. The models that exemplify and conjure successful leaders are lifted from these other sectors yet provide only partially relevant lessons for the modern school superintendent (Moore-Johnson, 1996). Not only do superintendents have to contend with the contextual issues their districts face in their specialized communities, superintendents are tasked with working in a collaborative environments to improve educational outcomes.

According to a study of 12 new district leaders sponsored by the National Center for Educational Leadership at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, superintendents were required to provide balanced leadership in three domains. As an instructional leader, superintendents must diagnose local educational needs, create a vision to provide a shared purpose, and provide strategies for improvement of teaching and learning. As a

political leader, superintendents interact with a variety of constituents ranging from city officials, board members, and union leaders to secure resources, gain decision-making authority, and cultivate the public relationships needed to improve their schools. Finally, superintendents must act as managerial leaders who use the structure of their respective districts to encourage communication and participation, allocate resources effectively, provide supervision and support, plan for future growth and sustainability, as well as ensure accountability mechanisms are in place (Moore-Johnson, 1996). The absence or imbalance of any one of these dimensions resulted in unsuccessful efforts to lead effective schools.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In a state that is experiencing dramatic demographic shifts in the increase of Hispanic classified students, the Latina representation at the superintendent level is abysmal. However, this disproportionality is legally permissible and a widely accepted practice that creates legitimacy in and among school districts in the state. U.S. courts (Edelman, 1992) and U.S. affirmative action regulations (Konrad & Linnehan, 2003; Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, 2002) do not require employers to demonstrate that they hire a diverse workforce.

Additionally, school districts can work around goals to hire diverse employees by concentrating diversity in teaching and auxiliary staff, the lower rungs of the district hierarchy. This satisfies the expectation that employers show a “good faith effort” to hire a diverse set of employees. Diversity management practices such as identifying and targeting more diverse feeder pools for job applicants have been sufficient to certify

organizations as making reasonable efforts as employers, regardless of the lack of diversity in their employment statistics (Edelman, 1992). Yet, students and communities who are increasingly more diverse are not represented in the higher echelons of leadership. Also, with the change in policy allowing the modified requirements to the superintendency certificate to substitute managerial experience for principal experience, there could be broader implications for aspiring Latina administrators in the pipeline. With this rule change being the norm in the charter school arena since their existence in Texas in 1995, there may be lessons that can be learned from the Latina CEOs as they have ascended in their organizations within these business-like conditions. Finally, the implications of the change in superintendent certification requirements may lead to the further subjugation of underrepresented groups. This holds true for minorities and women in the superintendency, given the allowance of managerial experience, particularly in regards to finance, for a district leader.

PURPOSE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given recent changes in policy discounting superintendent credentials as well as the small proportion of Latina district leaders, the purpose of the study is to examine the lived experiences of Latina superintendents and chief operating officers of school districts, traditional and charter, in Texas. This study aimed to improve understanding of the superintendency domains and provide recommendations to Latinas who aspire to the superintendency and need to be seen as viable candidate for the school district's top job. The research questions posed in this study are:

1. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, how do their career path experiences compare and contrast?
 - a. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their ascent?
 - b. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their role as superintendents?
2. For Latina district leaders, what kinds of professional support systems, such as mentoring, have they experienced in their careers?

Definitions of Terms

Aspirant – An educator who chooses to become a superintendent. This involves moving up the educational hierarchy (Brunner and Grogan, 2007; Young and McLeod, 2001).

CEO – Chapter 12 of the Texas Education Code describes the leader of an open enrollment charter school as the Chief Executive Officer.

Career path – “A traditional, pre-established total patterned, organized professional activity with upward movement through recognized preparatory stages, and advancement based on merit and honor” (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 65).

Charter school – A charter school is a type of public school. There are four types of charters in Texas. They include: home-rule school district charters, campus or campus program charters, open-enrollment charters, and university or junior college charters. Charter schools are subject to fewer state laws than other public schools. The reduced legislation is said to “encourage more innovation and allows more flexibility,” though

state law does require fiscal and academic accountability from charter schools (Texas Education Code §12, 1999).

District leader – The individual charged with managing a conglomeration of schools (comprising a district) and their functions, which include curriculum and instruction, finance, technology, internal and external communication, human resources, safety, operations, and transportation. The district leader is considered a person of influence in the political landscape of the larger community.

Educational leader – An individual who assumes a role of “clinical practitioner” and brings expert professional knowledge as related to teaching effectiveness, educational program development, and clinical supervision (Sergiovanni, 2007).

Glass-ceiling – Invisible barrier that hinders women and minorities in reaching the highest leadership positions in an organization based upon discriminatory practices (Yousry, 2006).

Hispanic or Latino/a – Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably to define a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Institutional theory – organizational homogeneity wherein institutions take up similar practices to prove professional legitimacy.

Mentor – A person who contributes their knowledge, proficiency, and experience to assist another person who is working toward the achievement of their own objectives (Cohen & Galbraith, 1995).

Mentoring – This is a term that refers to a developmental relationship that exists between two persons, typically a more experienced senior person and a less experienced junior person (Spielberger, 2004).

Pipeline – A system for developing or producing something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Professional experiences – Training, preparation, and career paths of individuals as they prepare for the superintendency.

School systems – Elementary and secondary structure that serves as an agency of socialization and where formal education takes place (Parsons, 1959).

School board of trustees – The governing party of a public school. The board of trustees of a traditional public school district is elected officials representing the district in which they reside. Charter school board of trustees are appointed, selected via a local process as regulated through governmental code.

Sponsor – A person who provides opportunities for one to be visible within circles of the educational profession (Tallerico, 2000).

State Board of Education – The State Board of Education (SBOE) sets policies and standards for Texas public schools. The primary responsibilities of the SBOE include: setting curriculum standards, reviewing and adopting instructional materials, establishing graduation requirements, overseeing the Texas Permanent School Fund, appointing board members to military reservation and special school districts, providing final review of rules proposed by the State Board for Educator Certification, reviewing the commissioner's proposed award of new charter schools, with authority to veto a recommended applicant. The board is made up of SBOE members elected from single-

member districts. The governor appoints one member to chair the board (Texas Education Agency).

Superintendent – Similar to CEOs in the private sector (Glass, 1992), the chief executive officer of a school district is employed by the School Board of Education to be the top-level school official who works to improve education (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995).

Superintendent certification – There are currently four requirements to obtain a Superintendent certificate in Texas: (1) must hold a master's degree from a university that is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the U.S. Department of Education Database for Accredited Colleges and Universities, (2) hold a principal certificate or the equivalent issued by the TEA, another state, or country, or complete the superintendent certificate application available on the TEA website and be granted approval by TEA to substitute managerial experience in lieu of a principal certificate, (3) successfully complete an approved superintendent educator preparation program, and (4) successfully complete the required certification exam (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

Texas Education Agency – The Texas Education Agency is the state agency that oversees primary and secondary public education; it is headed by the commissioner of education. The mission of TEA is to provide leadership, guidance and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students.

Traditional public school – a school that is maintained at public expense for the education of the children of a community or district and that constitutes a part of a system of free public education commonly including primary and secondary schools.

University-based leadership preparation program- universities that offer graduate degrees in educational leadership to include principals and superintendents preparation as a prerequisite to certification.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The review of the literature for this study will focus on four central areas of research. Each topic could stand alone in its own right, but will be presented to work together to cumulatively illustrate the ways in which the organizations within school systems function and the ways in which Latinas attempt to navigate this system to access the superintendency.

The first focus of the literature review will center on the superintendency and the role progression of the district leader from the inception of the job to our modern age. This will serve to anchor the competencies needed for a superintendent to persevere in the position. Most recently, this evolution has also had significance on the policy implications of superintendent licensure and preparation. Secondly, the nature of school districts have continued to evolve as well. Traditional school districts, that once had a monopoly on the organization of school systems, now find a competitor in charter school organizations. This burgeoning school system, designed to be more innovative and freed from bureaucracy, would seemingly be an ideal environment for nontraditional district leaders and promote opportunities for women and minorities, yet, issues of legitimacy may have also influenced charters as they increase in scale and gained prominence among schools as organizations.

The third focus will delve into the dynamics of gender and the success necessary for Latinas, in particular, to access power in these organizations as they progress from the classroom to the boardroom. This includes the significance of race and gender in the

context of schools and the significance of mentoring in this environment. These dynamics then lead to barriers as perceived by Latinas in the struggle to attain positions with more power and influence to include the attainment of advanced levels of education necessary for women to be included as a viable superintendent candidate.

This final focus will weave all of the previous variables into one coherent progression to illustrate the existing practices in both school systems as tenants of the new institutionalism theory. This conceptual framework serves to prove that school districts engage in similar practices in order to achieve legitimacy even among varying school environments.

The Superintendency

The role of superintendent in the school district realm holds a multitude of complex responsibilities today (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). However, this position has shifted quite dramatically over time. I will present a chronological evolution of the superintendency along with perceptions of current superintendents presented from the studies of contemporary educational leaders by researchers Kowalski and Bjork (2005).

School district superintendent responsibilities

In the beginnings of the formation of the role, early superintendents functioned as a clerk in service to the school board (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). This role existed prior to 1850 due to the school board's need to establish a figurehead but operated with hesitancy to transfer their power (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). The superintendent then evolved into "teacher scholars" who became known as master teachers. This instructional function has remained relevant over time and is identified among three of the five greatest challenges

identified by the superintendent today (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). Furthermore, Kowalski and Bjork (2005) cited assessing and testing learner outcomes (ranked second); dealing with demands for improving curriculum and instruction (ranked fourth); and coping with changing curriculum priorities (ranked fifth) among the most difficult aspects of the job.

Following the superintendency role's focus on the instructional aspect, critics argued that a co-superintendent arrangement should be considered (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). It was argued that this measure would be necessary to address the needs of a larger district, contending that the role should be separated in to two distinct jobs to delineate a business manager and superintendent of instruction. The business community voiced concerns that schools did not operate efficiently which led to the beginnings of university preparation consisting largely of school management courses. Superintendents in larger communities began to persuade the public that their work had become separate from and more important than teaching (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005).

The primary management duties assigned to superintendents, and still prominent to this day, included budget development and administration, standardization of operation, personnel management, and facility management. The importance of these emerging functions are evident in the perception of recent superintendents studied, who stated that 36% of superintendents indicated that the board's primary expectation was for them to be an effective organizational manager (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). In the 1930s, expectations that school administrators function as lobbyists and political strategists were introduced to the responsibility of the school leader. Approximately 13% of

superintendents today report that, indeed, the board's primary role expectation for them was that of democratic or political leader (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). Furthermore, administrators were expected to understand the external systems and contexts that affected their schools in order to provide essential leadership and management.

In fact, school superintendents today are expected not only to master the academic and business functions of the position, but also to contend with many contextual issues such as changing demographics, poverty, advances in technology, racism, bullying, drugs, and violence. Susan Moore-Johnson (1996), in her study of 12 new superintendents, emphasizes the importance of context to the complex role of the superintendent. Pervasive and continuing social factors impacting student performance requires superintendents to be at the forefront of ensuring that schools are simultaneously socially just, democratic, and productive. The sum of these competencies must be accomplished via communication skills expressed both internally and externally. Effective decision-making, for example, requires communication skills and conflict management. Kowalski and Bjork (2005) cited two contexts where communication is paramount: the need to restructure school cultures and the need to access and use information in a timely manner to solve problems of practice. A majority of superintendents reported having engaged regularly in communication-intensive interactions with parents and other citizens, including setting district objectives and priorities (68.7%), strategic planning (60.6%), fundraising (60%), and program and curriculum decisions (59.8%; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). In the presence of modern technologies, superintendents are compelled to communicate more often and more

intensely than ever before, yet adding another vital dimension to the job. Moore-Johnson (1996) categorized the dimensions of the district leader into three distinct elements: instructional, political, and managerial dimensions. The author argued that a balance of these three dimensions was essential for a successful tenure as a school superintendent.

Superintendency preparation is included in this discussion as it is often a prerequisite for advancement to the position. This is even more applicable to women as the literature will show that women must attain higher levels of education to be considered for district level leadership positions (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014). In the 2005 report titled, *Educating New Leaders*, Arthur Levine, President of Columbia's University Teacher's College, critiqued the existing preparation of school leaders as wholly inadequate, meaningless, and devoid of rigor (Levine, 2005) in light of the expectations for a superintendent noted previously. In Texas, there are four requirements for superintendents in order to obtain certification by the Texas Education Agency. The applicant must (1) hold a master's degree from an accredited university, (2) hold a Principal certificate or an equivalent, *or* complete a superintendent certificate application to substitute managerial experience in lieu of a principal certificate, (3) successfully complete an approved superintendent educator preparation program, (4) successfully complete the required exam (Texas Education Agency, 2016). The four page application to substitute managerial experience for a Principal certificate asks a total of three questions: (1) Describe your experience in supervising or appraising faculty or staff, (2) Describe your experience in conducting district-level planning and coordination of programs, activities, or initiatives, (3)

Describe your experience with creating and/or maintaining a budget (Texas Education Agency, 2016). This new application is important to note, yet, as the role becomes more complex and demanding, preparation is becoming increasingly easier to attain given the reduction of requirements and relaxing of standards. It is the concept of access that becomes problematic for minorities and women in aspiring to district leader in the state.

The development of charter schools in Texas

One such example of a school organization that was designed to have relaxed standards, particularly at the school leader level, in the name of promoting innovation and creativity are charter schools. Charter schools in Texas are free public schools designed to provide more choice for parents in public education. These alternatives were authorized by the Texas legislature in 1995 with and through the development of a written “charter” granted by the state, as either a home-rule school district charter, a campus or campus program charter, or an open-enrollment charter with variations in mission and model (Texas Education Code §12.002, 2001).

Home-rule charter schools were founded in Texas Education Code §§12.014-12.023. An entire school district may elect to convert to hold charter status by establishing a home-rule charter. This conversion requires multiple steps including: the board of trustees establishing a commission to frame the charter, obtaining preapproval of the charter by the U.S. Department of Justice (if it would change the governance of the district), obtaining approval of the charter by the commissioner of education, adoption of the charter by a majority of the qualified voters in an election in which at least 25 percent of the district’s registered voters participate, a certification of the adopted charter to the

secretary of state. At this time, no Texas school district has sought home-rule conversion, however, Dallas ISD did propose this conversion by their former superintendent in 2014.

School district campus and campus program charters were established in Texas Education Code §12.052. Texas school boards may grant a charter to a group of parents or teachers who want to operate a campus charter school if the majority of parents and teachers at the school sign a petition in support of the charter. The charter specifies the campus' educational program, its governing structure, and the conditions under which the charter may be revoked. In addition, school districts may contract with an education service provider to operate a campus program charter at a facility located within the district. The originating school district is held accountable for the academic and financial performance of campus and campus program charters.

Open-enrollment charter schools were established in Texas Education Code §12.101, 12.156(b). The State Board of Education may grant a charter to a public technical institute, public junior college, public senior college or university, medical or dental organization, public state college, certain private universities, a non-profit organization, or a governmental entity to operate an open-enrollment charter school or district. Open-enrollment charter schools may enroll students from any school district, cannot charge tuition, but may charge fees, and must provide transportation to the same extent as school districts. Open-enrollment charter schools are exempt from many of the laws governing traditional public schools and districts. The Texas legislature established

a cap on the number of open-enrollment charters the SBOE may grant, however, charters granted by universities are not subject to this cap.

There is some increased autonomy and flexibility inherent in charters, but the accountability practices are aligned with expected state standards to include state assessment requirements for all public school districts receiving state and federal funds. The 84th legislative session lifted the cap of 215 charter schools in Texas to allow a gradual expansion of open-enrollment charters each year until the total number of open-enrollment charters reaches 305 beginning September 1, 2019 (Texas Education Code §12.101).

More importantly, and for the purposes of this study, the Texas Education Code does not require charter leaders to hold a superintendency certification, only mandating a baccalaureate degree for open enrollment charter school principals and teachers (TEC §12.129). Additionally, the board of directors at charter schools are appointed via a local nomination and selection process as a governing body rather than serving as elected officials (TEC, §12.1012). School boards who are appointed in the charter school organizations are considered a governmental board per Chapters 551 and 552 of Governmental Code and are comprised of different demographics than traditional boards of trustees. On the whole, charter school board compositions are comprised of more females and a larger percentage of advanced degrees in comparison to elected school district boards of trustees (Ford & Ihrke, 2015). This may account for the state's total of 74 female CEOs found in the charter school sector, with eight identified as Latina (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

Coupled with the negative portrayal of the public school system and a political climate in Texas favorable to charter schools, the environment for what used to be a monopoly of traditional public schools has shifted. In terms of an economic standpoint, Betts (2005) stated “a single provider dominates the market” to operate without competition no longer exists and “there is a large number of providers and buyers” (p. 3). In this view, more competition, in terms of services, would equate to a greater number and higher quality of services to be delivered. Betts (2005) argued “some competition is almost always better for consumers than none, because it increases the quantity and quality of service provided for a given price” (p. 9). Nevertheless, with traditional school districts no longer monopolizing the market, the concept of CEO as a substitute for a superintendent has been introduced and is taking hold in the state. Given the absence of traditional superintendency preparation in the charter sector, implications for aspiring school leaders remain questionable. Furthermore, in the business model of a management company or non-profit organization acting as a school district, it becomes vital to examine the ascent of existing Latina CEOs as the counterpart to the certified, traditionally-prepared superintendent.

In the state of Texas, policy-makers have opened the door for the increase of CEOs as the new equivalent of the traditional school superintendents. The recent Texas charter expansion bill and charter proponents in the Texas governor, lieutenant governor, and now, Commissioner of Education’s office, however, may translate to privatization strategies with charter schools and charter leaders taking a prominent role in the district leader’s role given the approved increase in sheer numbers alone. The motivation for

lawmakers' decisions surrounding the increase in charters frequently revolves around results on student achievement (Hanushek, 1997, p.153). However, in the charter versus traditional public school debate, student achievement data varies depending on who is presenting the information or conducting the study and results are not yet conclusive (Ni & Arsen, 2010). Yet, with these responsibilities of academic and financial viability, charter schools districts and leader competencies required to manage these schools may begin to very closely resemble the same functions of traditional school districts superintendents.

Superintendent certificate waivers

This line between CEO and superintendent is further blurred due to the 2015 84th Legislative Session in Texas. Senate Bill 168 allows the state's commissioner of education to waive the superintendent certificate if requested by the district (TASA, 2015). The State Board of Education (SBEC) has also currently held public meetings to waive the superintendent certification requirement for traditional school districts as a result of the proposed amendment to chapter 242 of the Texas Administrative Code and has eliminated the teaching requirement and accepted managerial experience in exchange for a Principal certification as a superintendent certification requirement. This movement actually dates back to the 1980s as a result of intense public scrutiny by the business and political sectors (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). Currently, nine states no longer require superintendents to possess a license and, among the remaining 41 states, 21 have provisions for issuing waivers or emergency certificates. Moreover, 15 states allow or sanction alternative routes to licensure (alternatives to university-based study).

This trend towards privatization has been emerging for some time on a national level and has several powerful conglomerates who sponsor their scholarship and publications. *Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto*, issued by the Broad Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Institute in May 2003 presented editorials and anecdotal descriptions of the need for a different type of leader in schools than traditionally required, referring to university-based preparation programs and state licensing standards as meaningless red tape. The writers argued, "For aspiring superintendents, we believe that the states should require only a college education and a careful background check" (p. 31). The report also posits that business executives and retired senior military officers should serve as school superintendents.

The Ascension of Superintendents and the Salience of Gender and Race

Educational attainment and ascension paths

The vast amount of knowledge of competencies implicitly required in the superintendent position is typically garnered through a combination of experience in a school leadership setting and educational leadership courses. Aspiring female superintendents have similarly situated themselves to fit into this pathway of school leadership. Research illustrates this readiness finding that women in general have a higher level of educational attainment as a prerequisite to achieve membership in the higher echelons of educational administration. Females in educational administration masters and doctoral programs well surpass male student representation by more than 50% over the past ten years (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramvalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014). Similarly, Gloria, Castellanos, and Orozco (2005), in their study of Latina

undergraduates, found that Latinas defied stereotypes related to undervaluing education and took measures to aspire to advanced degrees and had high motivation to continue educational training. These findings illustrated that there were no shortage of women who aspired to the superintendency. On the whole, females are being prepared for the position, at least in the traditional preparation of superintendents, but are not being appointed to the job. In the changing context of Texas and a repurposing of the superintendency requirements, opening up the role to CEOs, military personnel, and other business sector leaders have the potential to continue to perpetuate the marginalization of women and, in particular, Latinas in the state of Texas.

Many studies referred to the concept of the “glass ceiling” but in the highly stratified realm of the upper echelons of educational leadership, have now come to refer to the ascension into male-dominated positions as “glass doors,” limiting women not only from higher pay, but increased authority (Caceres-Rodriguez, 2011). Studies found that females in general in school leadership roles have traditionally ascended via the elementary principal pipeline through a curriculum and instruction capacity at the central office level, yet remain limited to the role of educational leader (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014; Ortiz 2001; Wallace, 2014). Additionally, because female superintendent candidates hold the view that they were incompetent due to their lack of financial knowledge and experience in non-academic competencies, their choices for leadership remained limited (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014).

Moreover, findings in the Munoz et al. study found that women were promoted at an older age than their male counterparts due to potential seen in men early on while women had to work longer to achieve proven performance, thereby developing and cultivating female candidates with more expertise in the curriculum and instruction area (2014, p. 769). This filtering of viable women candidates essentially left aspiring superintendents to remain stagnant and plateau in the assistant superintendent domain.

Mentoring and networks

There is a plethora of research on the mentorship of school leaders in the educational arena that emphasize the importance of securing a mentor to ascend into school leadership positions (Angel, Killacky, & Johnson, 2013; Caceres-Rodriguez, 2011; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramvalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014; Ortiz, 2011). Benefits as cited in research included an increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, compensation, and promotion (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010). Mentoring provides protégés with opportunities for career advancements, providing appropriate development within the organization, and assists the protégé by providing a sense of professional competence (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010). Yet, there remains consensus that women in leadership do not have access to a professional mentor system. Caceres-Rodriguez (2011) argued that the kind of mentorship women received did not address the challenges they faced in the ascension path. Furthermore, the implications of the absence of a superintendency mentor led to the lack of female superintendents due to the networking element involved in the placement and

recommendation to the superintendent position (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramvalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014).

Latinas instead have been forced to synthesize the qualities of leaders to emulate those desirable traits they deem respectable and effective. Munoz et al. validated these findings in their 2014 study citing less-developed mentor systems and a shortage of female role models at the highest levels. They further posit that sponsors, mentors, and role models served as “validators of the female candidates” amongst the school board and existing superintendent networks (2014, p. 769). More importantly, sponsors were differentiated as gateways to increased opportunities for promotion and were sources of knowledge of the superintendent competencies. This type of coaching support would be able provide the protégés with the first-hand knowledge to navigate the organization, particularly where access to power is negotiated. Sponsors have the ability to introduce protégés to senior officials within an organization, advocate for lateral movement, and provide exposure and visibility to build public support for the aspiring leaders (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010). The role of sponsors, who could potentially teach the more elusive competencies first-hand and are viewed as advocates for potential superintendents, were even more limited than role models and mentors for minority female educational leaders (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramvalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014).

Gender stratification in schools

In considering gender equity in the superintendency, it is important to consider the history of women in schools and school organizational culture. Blount (1998), for

instance, presented national stories of women in a chronology to reveal how the teaching corps became relegated to women while men dominated the role of superintendents. Blount also explored the advocacy behind attempts to navigate the legal and judicial system to eliminate gender inequalities in both schooling and educational efforts. This resulted in women engaging in subtle forms of resistance as they became more vocal in their opposition to these inequities (Blount, 1998). The gender imbalance seems to mirror the figures in Texas schools wherein only 23% of superintendents of traditional school districts are female (The Texas Education Agency, TEA, 2015).

School culture can also be a hindrance to gender equity. Heilman and Eagly (2008) found that traits associated with women included positive communal qualities such as niceness and warmth, were considered inconsistent with a masculine job role such as school leader. In addition, Martin's (2011) study of women in leadership positions in higher education found that while gains have been made, women still face gender discrimination on their ascension path resulting in higher attrition rates and a slower upward mobility rate. The author also argued that women in educational leadership positions are more critically evaluated than their male counterparts and less valued than in other fields (Martin, 2011).

Using a feminist economics theory and feminist organizational theory, Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer (2006) framed women's struggles in the workplace from an economic standpoint. This study analyzed access and representation of women in the superintendency and suggests there are institutionalized market forces and systemic patterns that make change and resistance difficult. The authors suggested a

reorganization of workplace norms to be more adaptive to the unique needs of women in order to mitigate the effect of the system on women's choices (2006).

Yet, the stratification found in the staffing patterns of school districts has not always resembled the inequities of today's educational system. In fact, the 1920s in the history of United States schooling is termed as the "Golden Age" for women as school leaders (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). However, after World War II and the introduction of the GI Bill, veterans became educated and infiltrated the workforce. The woman's role evolved into that of a mother with the domain centering on the home. Bobbit-Zeher's (2011) research supports this idea; this narrative study revealed that women workers are first viewed as women and second as workers. In Kanter's seminal work, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, she argued that in positions where women hold "token" positions, uncomfortable situations such as "social invisibility, boundary heightening, and performance pressures" abound (p. 238). The author explained that in order for a minority group to build supportive alliances against these divisive practices, there must be a tipping point to shift the dominant group. These arguments, Kanter (1977) held, are applicable to any work environment where a dominant group outnumbers a scarce minority group.

While many often assume men are the culprits of workplace discrimination, however, for Latinas in particular, Flores (2011) contends that it is their White colleagues in the school context who exude a similar form of racial discrimination in politically charged states such as California, the site of her study. The author argued that despite this era of diversity and multiculturalism, color-blind racial policies and strong anti-

immigrant and anti-Mexican sentiments are currently leading to exclusionary practices that arise in the educational workplace (p. 314). Simmons, Lewis, and Larson found that traditionally marginalized groups tended to identify with their race and understand its presence while the White majority rarely ever had to consider their race (2011).

Consistent with Bobbit-Zeher's 2011 study, Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramvalho, Mills, and Simonssen's (2014) study found aspiring superintendent female candidates are viewed differently as their male counterparts, as they are seen first as women, then as superintendents. In their findings the authors cited challenges that promoted negative gender stereotypes such as perceptions of incompetence by school boards, lack of promotion within university programs and school board organizations, lack of knowledge and experience, and the need for training in the superintendent competencies to include operations, facility matters, and finance. Female superintendents are also largely underrepresented in administration in secondary schools, which is often a common path leading to the superintendency.

However, it seems that the perception of others also contributes to the perception of the self in terms of competencies of female superintendents nationwide. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) quantified the self-perceptions of female superintendents, finding that 82% of participants did not view themselves as strong managers and 76% felt school boards did not view them as competent in regards to school finance (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). Also, citing the gender-specific expectations of our culture, the social norm dictated that it was "not natural" for women to become a superintendent because of how they would be perceived (Brunner, 2000).

Negative self-perceptions of women superintendents are translated in the quantified demographics of those holding school district leadership positions. Currently in Texas, only 23% of females are appointed as the superintendent of a school district while 76.6% of teachers in all school districts and charter schools in Texas are female (The Texas Education Agency, TEA, 2015).

While gender equity is a significant problem in the PK12 schools, a singular focus on women inadequately addresses the needs of Latinas. Latinas confront unique challenges as they experience discrimination based on gender and race. Their journey to navigate school's organizational norms to ascend to the superintendency, therefore, requires particular attention.

Latina cultural roles

There is an inclination founded in feminist thought that group all women together as a whole. Latinas must be considered as a separate group within this gendered whole, accounting for important differences due to racial and ethnic attributes and thus navigate the ascension path in a manner unique to Latinas. While there is a body of research focused on gender issues in general, there are only a few studies that delve into Latina specific literature. This component has become increasingly important given the increase in the Hispanic student group across the country and is vital to frame in this study. Mendez-Morse considered these unique characteristics and conducted a study of six school leaders in West Texas and identified three stages of an aspiring leader in education: *teacher*, *la mandona*, and *hesitant emergent leader*. The Latinas studied averaged 9.5 years of teaching experience before becoming an administrator. They

worked in predominantly Hispanic student populations and continuously sought to improve their practice to improve their curricular knowledge. They received supplementary certifications and graduate degrees to enhance their training to become recognized as effective educators, and as teachers they served as mentor teachers for beginning instructors and developed positive relationships with their supervising principals.

This dynamic of increased responsibilities led these Latinas to observe their administrators more closely, leading them to want to make a larger impact in their schools. As a *mandona*, a Spanish term for giving directives and getting things done, the Latinas acted as informal campus leaders. This is the stage in their career when they took initiative and carried out tasks to enhance their schools. It was at this time that their leadership traits began to be displayed and the next logical step became to lead the school. It is in this final step that the Latinas moved into the final phase of what Mendez-Morse termed as the hesitant, emerging leader (2004). In their narratives, the women's ultimate decision was based on taking the next step into the leadership position to attempt to make a difference in the lives of the minority students they served (Mendez-Morse, 2004).

Latinas perceptions as barriers to ascension

Yet, in the climb up the ladder made in an attempt to help those in circumstances much like themselves, Latinas experienced a sense of both comfort and unique challenges within their personal situations. On the one hand, in the absence of a mentor, Latinas tended to rely on family support and personal role models for the motivation to excel in

leadership positions (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Wallace 2015). On the other hand, Latinas have vocalized the devotion to their family as being a challenge in aspiring to the executive levels (Espinoza, 2010). While societal expectations applauded males who elevate their family by taking leadership positions, women were viewed as abandoning their familial obligations to pursue a career that often takes them away from their families or forces the relocation of the family (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014).

Moreover, Espinoza pointed out that *familismo*, involving a strong loyalty and attachment to the family requires Latinas to prioritize family over individual interests (2010). The Munoz et al. study also found that while men viewed two to three years in the superintendency as successful, female superintendents looked forward to serving a district for longer terms (2014, p. 779). These stints were also viewed as unappealing for Latinas who strived to serve the communities they felt indebted to in a long-term capacity. This led to serving in a position at the central office of an assistant or deputy superintendent, holding less authority short-term but ensuring more stability in the long-term (Munoz et al., 2014).

Nichols (2012) found that, besides character values such as personal ethics, the ability to budget and allocate resources was the second most important factor in the desired traits of a superintendent in Texas, followed by the relationships with external stakeholders to include community members. In choosing who is qualified to undertake a job with enormous time constraints, the combination of a perceived lack of knowledge in traditionally masculine competencies paired with presumed family obligations, whether

real or assumed, may provide the perfect storm for the lack of consideration for Latina candidates.

This study, by focusing on Latina superintendents who have successfully navigated the ascension path despite the challenges presented provides powerful testimony for Latinas administrators who strive to sit in the superintendent's chair. The changing policy context produces a powerful backdrop that could further cause the perception of the magnification of critiques as accurate in the superintendency competencies context given their experiences. My aim for this study of Latina superintendents and CEOs was, therefore, to provide voice to those marginalized by this system. The final section of this chapter will discuss the theoretical frameworks I will utilized in the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: LATCRIT AND NEW INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

In order to address the research questions posed in this study I developed a conceptual framework that joins together LatCrit, a branch of critical theory that addresses the racial aspect of the participants, and new institutional theory, that explores decision-making at the organizational level. Due to the continued marginalization of Latinas at the school executive level in an increasingly diverse state, organizations persist in maintaining a hegemonic and homogenous staffing at the superintendent position.

LatCrit and critical race theory (CRT)

Creswell (2013) stated, "critical theory perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed in them by race, class, and gender" (p. 30). Since this study focuses on Latinas and the struggles they encounter as

they gain access to a male dominated position, LatCrit was an appropriate framework to guide the analysis. LatCrit, as a complement to critical theory, challenges research to find silenced voices in qualitative data and recognizes that Whiteness seeks to stifle these voices (Yosso, Villalpando, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001). Additionally, LatCrit addresses the intersectionality of a Latina's identity representing traditional forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism:

CRT [critical race theory] and LatCrit in education can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how education theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain race and ethnic groups. (Bernal, 2002, p. 109)

This framework allows the researcher to view the educational arena as political and sees the superintendency as a privileged, White male position in order to critique this traditional occurrence as a matter of social justice.

By merely accepting the position, Latina superintendents challenge the status quo by attempting to take a seat at the table in a White male dominated world of the superintendency. When one envisions the position of the superintendent in Texas, a certain image comes to mind and Latinas are not to be found. Therefore, CRT principles insist that this type of racism is endemic to and ingrained in our society and concepts of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy must be challenged as one can argue that the past and current superintendents are viewed as the most qualified candidates (Alemon, 2009). Furthermore, it was necessary to begin providing spaces for voices of the marginalized in order to provoke social transformation and present counterstorytelling to highlight the narratives not often expressed by the Latinas

represented in this study (Yosso, Villalpando, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001, p. 94). It is by using a CRT framework that one can begin to understand the ways in which Latinas have been ultimately subjugated as the workhorses in the classrooms of our schools yet largely prohibited from leading school districts.

New institutional theory

While the study will be grounded in LatCrit, I supplemented this framework with new institutional theory. New institutional theory offered a valuable theoretical lens for addressing superintendency competencies that challenge aspiring Latinas in their ascent to the superintendency. New institutional theory emphasizes the normative contexts within which organizations exist. In this view, an understanding of organizational structures and actions cannot be separated from an understanding of the social environment (Martinez & Dacin, 1999). A critical component of the social environment influencing the structuring of organizations is institutions, which can be defined as “regulative, normative, and cognitive structures and activities that provide stability and meaning for social behavior” (Scott, 1995, p. 33). Regulative institutions include laws, regulations, and rules; normative institutions include social and professional norms; and cognitive institutions include cultures and ethics (Scott, 1995).

These institutions exert three forms of pressure on organizations to conform to their expectations. Coercive pressures arise from societal expectations among similar organizations; normative pressures arise from professionalization; and mimetic pressures derive from uncertainty in environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). As organizations in the same field are subject to similar coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures, they

tend to develop similar sets of administrative constructions. For this reason, institutional pressures result in a uniform organizational structure, such as school districts (Scott, 1995).

By adopting structures that conform to institutional requirements, organizations prove their conformity to social norms and thereby cultivate legitimacy for their operations. Legitimacy refers to whether organizational actions are accepted and approved by internal and external stakeholders (Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008). Legitimacy is a valuable commodity that indicates an organization's ownership of its actions and integrity in its transactions, which are factors helping the organization to reap material resources from a wide variety of actors (Oliver, 1997). New institutional theory suggested that similarities in the decision-maker's educational and professional experiences contribute to similarities in business models, structures, and practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Therefore, "institutionalization" described the processes through which socially appropriate organizational forms and behaviors become rule-like and remain largely unquestioned (Martinez & Dacin, 1999).

According to new institutional theory, an organization tends to mimic its competitors as a way to reduce uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This leads to the negative effect institutionalization can have on organizations and systems. For example, the institutionalization of talent or human management practices and their status as the traditional method of conducting business constitutes a barrier to change as organizations attempt to develop new approaches that could be more effective for developing diversification in leadership. Institutional theory, therefore, served to explain

the similarities of the selection practice of placing demographically similar leaders in positions of power, and it provided insight on the expectations of superintendency critical attributes.

DISCUSSION

The literature demonstrated that there were various challenges confronting ascending Latina school leaders who disrupted this gendered space of school leadership. Lack of a defined mentor system, or rather, a mentor system developed to include Latinas, is a major obstacle (Mendez-Morse, 2004). A mentor program designed to sponsor a traditional candidate serves to promote a majority White male ascension into the superintendency given mentor selection and grooming of a protégé occurs within similarities of race, gender, and ethnicity (Mendez-Morse, 2004). The existing system also led Latina educational leaders to synthesize an artificial mentor comprised of various traits and respectable characteristics present in school personnel encountered along the way without a sponsor to help them to navigate the male dominated system or advocate on their behalf (Mendez-Morse, 2004). The extant literature suggested there was a need for a separate, tailored mentor structure designed to be inclusive of women of color, particularly Latinas in Texas.

Given the scant number of Latina superintendents, the mentor structure must be re-conceptualized to fit the needs of the changing demographics and policies in Texas and the nation. This need for change includes implications for superintendent preparation programs and recruiting methods for potential candidates, targeting the competencies not traditionally associated with female superintendents. If mentors can be developed within

these programs to begin by deliberately recruiting promising Latina candidates to accurately reflect the changing demographics in Texas, the network at the preparatory level can act as a conduit for Latina mentorship. The female superintendents studied in the literature had highly influential mentors in their network who urged them to apply for a superintendency position they knew was available (Angel, Killackey, & Johnson, 2013). Mentors advocated for these women and pushed them to persevere in the face of obstacles. However, the abysmal numbers and evident lack of progress made in the numbers of Latinas, and female superintendents, suggested the design must be rethought with more than one clientele in mind.

As noted in the literature, women also had to become more resilient in the face of subtle gender expectations and an increased scrutiny based on established social and cultural norms (Ortiz, 2001; Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). Female superintendents also non-assertively sought out the superintendent position, waiting for a job lead or recommendation from within the organization to call them to the job (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramvalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014). Latinas must begin to develop an aggressive plan to prepare for the superintendency and should be made aware of the struggles associated with the process and the knowledge desired by a school board. Preparing aspiring Latina leaders in this way will serve to anticipate the issues they will confront and work towards overcoming these challenges proactively. Yoder (2001) argued that where a masculine context is dominant, “hierarchical and oriented toward power and performance tasks, strategies to enhance women’s status” and legitimize women as leaders is necessary (p. 826).

There are also definite implications for the impending policy decisions for the both the altered requirements of the superintendent certificate and the increase in charter networks in Texas. These two subjects go hand-in-hand, as an increase in charters will most definitely result in non-traditional and uncertified quasi-superintendents. With school choice infiltrating traditional school districts as well, large districts such as Dallas ISD are considering options such as home-rule charters, magnet schools, and school transformation models (schools in need of improvement reopening as intra-district charter schools). This competition has spurred this reformation of traditional school districts and leads to the need to revision superintendent preparation models while changes in policy promote nontraditional leaders which may lead to organizational isomorphism according to new institutionalism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). While the academic results of charters are not definitive and have yet to consistently prove their highly touted success, policy-makers must question their rational for furthering the appointments of non-traditional leaders

CONCLUSION

There are gaps in the literature related to the lived experiences of Latina superintendents partly because there are relatively few of the superintendents that exist in the system. Several studies focus on women in educational leadership positions in general (Brunner, 2000; Garrett-Staib & Burkman, 2015; Kowalski, & Stouder, 1999; Munoz, Pankake, Murakami Ramalho, Mills, & Simonsson, 2014; Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004; Wallace, 2015; Yoder, 2001), but fail to focus on the unique experiences of Latinas. This is problematic since the numbers of Latino students in

Texas comprise a rapidly growing majority (US Census Bureau, 2010; Texas Education Agency, 2015). According to the 2014-2015 Texas Education database, a total of 17 out of 1,231 superintendents and CEOs in Texas districts and charter schools are Latina females (The Texas Education Agency, TEA). These statistics alone discount the unique experiences and barriers Latinas face in their environments and in the contexts of schools, where women made up the 76.5% of the state's teacher workforce and 25.6% of these female educators are Hispanic, according to the 2014-2015 TAPR State Profile (The Texas Education Agency, TEA).

Given the proliferation of this model in Texas, the reality of Texas demographics, and the dearth of Latinas in superintendency positions, there is a need to understand how Latinas in traditional school districts and charter school districts experience the superintendency and make sense of their competencies and mentorship experiences. The current preparatory model of traditional superintendents may no longer be applicable in this new paradigm, but this study serves to inform future Latina superintendents, school boards, and preparatory programs to provide a clearer pathway and applicable support mechanisms for aspiring Latina leaders.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology and procedures to be used in this study. Included are the purpose of the study, research questions, and a rationale for the selected methodology and design. This chapter also outlines the sources of data, description of the sample, procedures for data collection, methods for data analysis, and strategies to promote trustworthiness.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the ascension paths of Latina superintendents and CEOs who are currently in place at districts and charter schools in Texas in order to explore the phenomena of their ascension to include perceived proficiencies in the superintendent competencies that led to their placement in the superintendent position in Texas. The overarching goal of the study is to relate superintendent training and competencies attainment during the preparation period that led to the placement as a school district's top leader given the changing context of policy in regards to superintendency certification and the increase in charter schools in Texas. I also underscore the importance of professional support systems in the advancement of superintendency candidates currently lacking in the advancement of aspiring Latina leaders.

Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

1. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, how do their career path experiences compare and contrast?
 - a. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their ascent?
 - b. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their role as superintendents?
2. For Latina district leaders, what kinds of professional support systems, such as mentoring, have they experienced in their careers?

Analytical Paradigm

The analytical paradigm that was used in this study was critical theory. The ontology underlying the critical theory frame assumes that there is a ‘reality’ that is understandable. This is a reality created and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender-based forces that have been crystallized over time into social structures that are taken to be natural or real. People, including researchers, function under the assumption that for all practical purposes these structures are real. Critical theorists believe this assumption is inappropriate. The goal of this research study is to provide insight into the above research questions. The critical theory paradigm will allow for a more reflective approach to be taken as the Latina school leaders convey their perspective of their ascension paths given their identification as a Latina or Hispanic female superintendent or CEO.

Epistemology

From a critical theory standpoint, knowledge is constructed within a context of power and privilege (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). The idea of privilege must be examined and, in this case, interrogated as Latina superintendents, and those aspiring to the position, are seemingly experiencing unearned privilege based on their race and gender. The realm of the superintendent includes significant participation in a governance system dominated by males. When Latinas begin to center their racial identity it establishes the operational position of power constituted by Latinas acting as change agents in this traditional model. Race, ethnicity, and power all act in concert as factors of resilience for these women. Organizations are resistant to this type of power as well-defined roles already exist in a currently feminized space of education. Aspiring Latinas are, therefore, defying the social order and this defiance acts as the very tenets that define the LatCrit epistemology, which focuses on power as well as opposition in spaces where they are not welcomed (V. Saenz, personal communication, April, 7, 2016).

Need for Qualitative Research

Due to the small numbers of Latina superintendents in the state, a quantitative study could only tell a superficial story of these school leaders in Texas. Therefore, it was necessary to delve into the perceptions and lived-experiences of this special group of women to thoughtfully relate their experiences for the benefit of others: “It goes beyond the basics of facts, feelings, observations, and occurrences, to include inferences into the meaning of present data” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 213). Thick, rich descriptions were useful for this qualitative study because this will allow for transferability (Creswell,

2007). This allows the researcher to capture the meaning or message through the participants' descriptions.

Qualitative research methodology

The purpose of this research study was to describe the lived experiences of Latina superintendents and CEOs in their ascension to the superintendency in Texas. An examination of these experiences in the wake of major policy changes in the state was juxtaposed with the changing demographics of Texas schoolchildren in light of the Latina superintendents' path to the superintendency. The need for a qualitative study was based on the lack of data regarding multiple perspectives and assessments from Latina superintendents (partly due to the small numbers of Latina superintendents on the whole) and charter school CEOs in particular. A qualitative study allowed for a personalized and customized interview process using open-ended questions based on each superintendent's ascension experience. The research study focused on the significance of the Latina superintendents' experiences and perceptions of those experiences, focusing primarily on the attainment of particular competencies. Each Latina school leader's perspective and assessment of her ascension plan and preparation provided great personal reflection on their unique experience.

Instrumental case study

Case studies allow for the study of a phenomena within its context: "This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood" (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case studies allow for more than mere understanding of a particular situation, as it

can provide insight into a special topic. In an instrumental case study, the case becomes the secondary interest to play a supportive role, to facilitate the larger issue of the studied phenomenon. The case is often looked at in depth with its contexts examined and its ordinary activities detailed. This particular type of case study assists the researcher pursue external interests (Stake, 1995). This design enabled the exploration of issues and testing of established points of view about these issues. It also served in the identification of commonalities and differences within the boundaries defining a case, which lent itself to the traditional school district and charter school contexts presented. Stake (1995) described such case studies as responsive to posed research question where a need for general understanding exists. Therefore, insight was derived around the research questions by studying a particular case, making this design applicable in this particular study of Latina school superintendents. In this study, the two defined cases were (1) traditional superintendents and (2) charter school CEOs. This allowed the researcher to examine the experiences of the traditional superintendents and charter school CEOs as two separate groups and then to compare between the groups' experiences.

Phenomenology

For the scope of this study, phenomenological research design within the bounds of a case study was most appropriate to the proposed lines of inquiry. Creswell (2013) defined the overarching aim of phenomenology to understand what participants experienced and how they experienced it, in order to determine the essence of the experience. Moustakas explained phenomenology as “not concerned with matters of fact but seeks to determine meaning”; thus, perception becomes the primary source of

knowledge (1994). Hays and Singh (2012) argued that phenomenological theory is based on the deep understanding of participants' lived experiences within the context of those occurrences. By developing a deep understanding of a shared experience, the ascension and placement of a Latina to the superintendency position, from the perspective of those who lived it, this study did, in fact, yield practical and intellectual benefits for aspiring leaders in Texas who desire to be superintendents.

Theoretical Perspective

To analyze this phenomenon, I chose to examine the experiences of Latina administrators utilizing new institutional theory. New institutional theory provided valuable theoretical frame for examining the questions surrounding the study of Latina superintendents and charter school CEOs. This theory was utilized to reimagine and analyze the changing environment in education by researchers in the 1970s (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). Institutional theory calls attention to the influence an organization's culture has on its structures and practices. While traditional public school systems have sustained its structures for generations, the organization of its system has not changed significantly over the years, even when accounting for the vast demographic and contextual differences between school districts. Charter schools, while founded on principles of innovation have begun to evolve within the "wider institutional environment of public schools" (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). Yet, because the structures of schooling bring about public judgments of legitimacy, charter schools have the motivation to conform to the very structures they have the ability to resist. Through the desire to belong and be considered viable, the pressure to fit into the prescribed model of

schooling may seem irresistible for charters. This then leads to similar practices of acquiring talent at the highest levels. However, in this context, it may seem that policies at the state level, in terms of superintendent requirements, are currently borrowed from the charter arena. Therefore, this has led to a mimicry of practices between these two branches of schooling. This interesting interplay was the rationale behind employing this theoretical framework.

Sampling

The participants that I chose for this study were Latina superintendents and CEOs from both traditional and charter school districts in Texas. Each participant self-identified as a Latina or a Hispanic and served in the superintendent/CEO capacity for at least two years. The data gathering locations for the study took place in the offices of the different superintendents or via telephone, at the behest of the participant.

Participant selection

Participant selection began with a review of the 2015 list of public school superintendents in Texas. This list was obtained from the Texas Education Agency's published superintendent salary report and the Texas Association of Latino Administrators. From these general lists, Latina superintendents were selected for invitation to participate in this study and identified by researching each participant's district website as well as through networking and speaking to educational peers and state university leaders with knowledge of Latina superintendents in their particular region. Participants were selected from the pool of 17 Latinas who have been initially identified as currently serving as a public school superintendents and charter school CEOs in Texas

at the time of proposal of the study. I also utilized snowball sampling, asking the initial participants if they know of additional participants who met the criteria of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). A benefit of snowball sampling was the quick access to participants it provides.

Six potential participants were then identified based on investigative research of these individuals fitting the purposeful sampling criteria. Next, potential participants were sent an electronic invitational letter requesting their participation in the study. The letter contained the following information: (a) a brief description of the research project, (b) the rationale for selection in the study, (c) an explanation of potential document collection, and (d) a request to participate in an interview and subsequent focus study with the other study participants. After receiving written acknowledgements, the final participants were selected based on their ability to feasibly participate in the study. After the selection, the participants were contacted via telephone to inform them of their selection. Some conversations were facilitated by the administrative assistant of the study participant. Initial conversations served as the foundation to establish a relationship and purpose for the study with the participants.

Institutional approval

To ensure that appropriate steps were taken to protect the rights, privacy, and welfare of participants, the researcher applied for review and approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas at Austin. The researcher completed all necessary paperwork required to conduct external research before initiating contact with the selected participants. Identifiable information from participant responses

were assigned codes to ensure that respondents were not linked with their responses and that the superintendents were not identifiable. Data obtained from the study were stored in a locked file. To maintain the confidentiality of data, codebooks, and participant data will be stored in separate locked files.

Interviews

Once the University and participant school districts granted consent to conduct the research, the researcher solicited interviews from study participants. To facilitate the interview process, the researcher met with participants in their offices if agreed upon by the study participant. If the participant was unable to meet in person, the researcher requested a phone interview to be conducted. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. One semi-structured interview was conducted in each superintendent's office or via phone when a face-to-face meeting was not feasible. One advantage of this form of face-to-face interview is the depth and breadth of each participant's individualized perspective can potentially be revealed (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 239). The initial interview established the background information of each participant along with a description of their ascension experience to include the perception of superintendent competencies and mentorship leading to their ultimate placement as a superintendent. A final interview was conducted as a focus group in a face-to-face meeting at the regional service center of a subset of the study participants so as to allow the interaction between participants to spark dialogue that may otherwise had not been shared between the participants and the researcher during the

initial interview. Included in the focus interview were one traditional Latina superintendent and one Latina charter school CEO.

Data collection

Data sources and documents used as supporting evidence were used to describe the participants' experiences and a significant amount of time was spent developing relationships with the participants (when available) to cultivate a trusting and respectful rapport to fully capture their individual experiences (Creswell, 2007). This consisted of one individual interview and a focus group interview to capture interactions among the shared experiences of the school leaders. To supplement interview data, superintendent and CEO job descriptions, superintendent salary information, and documents regarding the Latina study participants available online were reviewed. These documents were analyzed to examine the preference of competencies to help understand how candidates were perceived based on the language of what is desired in a school district superintendent and given public comments in online forums. I asked participants, in advance, to recall milestones on their path to ascension to the superintendency and reasons for pursuing this position, realizing that the participants needed some time for reflection.

The Latina superintendents and CEOs were asked to participate in an interview to understand whether they felt barriers existed surrounding the superintendent competencies to discover how they overcame these challenges to ultimately win the position. The subsequent focus group was held in conjunction with two study participants and focused on their identities as a Latina superintendent and CEO in Texas.

This allowed the study participants to hone in on their current experiences, with questions focused on the knowledge of the competencies they formed as well as competencies perceived as valued by various stakeholders to include school board members, subordinate staff members (superintendent's cabinet), and community members. This focus group served as a final reflection to allow for interaction between a traditional public superintendent and a charter school CEO for the purpose of comparing and contrasting traditional and charter experiences, perceptions of the two contexts, and similarities between competencies if such similarities exist. All interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the participants to ensure accuracy, adding to the trustworthiness of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was an ongoing process that began with the initial data collection. Interview transcripts were coded using prefigured categories and emergent categories: "Prefigured codes [a priori codes] or categories often limit the analysis to the prefigured codes rather than opening up the codes to reflect the views of participants in a traditional qualitative way" (Creswell, 2007, p. 152). Therefore, additional codes were added to the coding scheme as they emerged during the analysis. Two types of coding processes were used for data analysis: open coding and axial coding (Creswell, 2007). Open coding provided a general type of analysis for wide review. Axial coding narrowed open coding and identified relationships of open coding. These two coding techniques worked together to refine the data analysis process and identify themes across cases.

A cross-case analysis was utilized to compare the two cases of traditional Latina superintendents and Latina CEOs of charter schools. This research method served to facilitate the comparison of commonalities and differences in the two cases (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). The benefits of the use of a cross-case analysis as a research method was to activate knowledge from individual case studies. It was incumbent on the researcher to accumulate case knowledge, compare and contrast cases and, in doing so, produce new knowledge (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). Mining case studies allows knowledge from the cases to function as valuable information for broader purposes. Rather than solely relying on the premise that the traditional public school superintendent is similar to the charter school CEO experience, the researcher was allowed to delineate the factors of similarities and differences and make sense of unique findings. This provided opportunities to learn from the two cases and gather critical evidence to modify policy such as the decisions regarding superintendent requirements. Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008) offered their insight for researchers engaging in cross-case analysis. The authors found that the use of this type of analysis was optimal when the cases represent rich examples of cases the researcher has knowledge about; the cases were deemed comparable in relation to patterns of similarities and differences; the cases were accessible; meaningful connections between cases were made explicit by the researcher, and the researcher could potentially produce and share new knowledge through cross-case analysis methodologies. It was in these described parameters that lent this particular study to this type of analysis.

Strengths of methods

As a methodology, a phenomenological study within the bounds of an instrumental case design was advantageous because it allowed for an in-depth study an experience or phenomena. Since the research study was centered on the experiences of Latina district leaders in various contexts, a case study was more appropriate than other methods because it allowed the researcher to understand “how” this happens instead of merely describing or understanding “what” was happening. A case study also allows for an investigation into phenomenon in its context, due to the policy changes in the certification of the superintendent has not yet fully been understood or evident. Further, interviews with the Latina school district leaders allowed for the researcher to attain information from their experiences and their perceptions. Participants provided valuable context through their responses, further adding to depth of follow-up questions (Creswell, 2007). Finally, these methods allowed the researcher to regulate questions and provide focus to the goals of the research.

Prior to interviewing each of the participants, the researcher developed a list of predetermined, or a priori codes, listed in Table 1. Parent a priori codes, or major codes are listed on the left hand side of the table. The parent codes provided a generalization for the interview protocol and are aligned with the research questions. Child a priori codes, or subcodes, are listed on the left hand side of the table. The child codes provided specificity to the parent codes and allowed the researcher to uncover motivating factors leading to dominant themes. Figure 1 lists the a priori parent and child codes that guided this study.

Table 1: Parent and Child a Priori Codes

<i>A Priori Codes</i>	<i>Child Codes</i>		
<i>Latina identity</i>	Gender		
<i>Self-perception</i>	Self-doubt	Confidence	
<i>Preparation</i>	Degrees	On-the-job training	
<i>Support</i>	Mentor	Networks	Family
<i>Competencies</i>	Curriculum		
<i>Politics</i>	School board		
<i>Motivation</i>	Dissatisfaction	Students	

Emergent codes were identified during the coding process that developed as the data was examined. These emergent codes were identified as the researcher investigated commonalities in the data through constant comparison. Constant comparison is when previously collected data are constantly compared to current data to develop additional emergent concepts or themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). Table 2 provides a list of emergent codes that evolved during the data analysis process. Interview transcripts were coded for occurrences of a priori and emergent codes. A priori and emergent codes were collapsed to produce emerging themes. Open coding was used to identify generalizations of the findings. Axial coding was used to determine which, if any, associations existed among the findings. This coding method helped to identify the perceptions about the ascent and experiences of Latina superintendents and CEOs in Texas public and charter schools.

Table 2: Key Words and Phrases Sorted by Theme

<i>A Priori and Emergent Codes</i>	
A Priori Codes	Emergent codes
<p>Latina identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender <p>Self-perception:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-doubt • confidence <p>Preparation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education • on-the-job training <p>Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentor • networks <p>Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • curriculum 	<p>Latina identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embrace • Identity blind • adversity <p>Self-perception:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initiative <p>Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family <p>Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human resources • Operations

<p>Table 2 (cont.)</p> <p>Politics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school board <p>Motivation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dissatisfaction • students 	<p>Charter Schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities • Perceptions • Segregation • Relationships
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Positionality

It is also important for the researcher to keep adequate notes and reflections throughout the research process: “A reflective journal includes thoughts about how the research process is impacting the researcher” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 205). This was maintained in a hard-copy journal. Notes included reactions to participants’ responses, personal reactions, and settings involved in the research. This journal was retained for continuous assessing purposes throughout the study. The accompanying notes were also used as a reminder to the researcher to clarify questions and justify the coding of themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). Additionally, the journal also provided additional insight into the interviewees’ responses.

In addition, as the researcher I used my reflective journal to continue to explore my positionality and how it was affecting my research. In research we often speak of intersectionality and where our identity can potentially pervade our paradigms. Let me begin first by examining the obvious. I am a Latina of Lebanese descent. I exist as a woman of two ethnic groups with very negative connotations in America that have been extremely marginalized, especially given the context of the current national political landscape. I found that after becoming aware of LatCrit literature that I was not alone in my thoughts and my stance on social justice issues shared a space with other like-minded individuals.

Additionally, I grew up in an urban area of San Antonio and am a product of the public school system through high school. I can relate to students whose teachers and administrators doubt them and maintain low expectations for their outcomes. My

undergraduate years at a predominantly White private liberal arts college only amplified my frustrations at the system, yet, I also know the power that one educator can have in the life of a child. So while I have experienced inequity firsthand, I hold on to a glimmer of optimism. This is why I was attracted to the charter sector and believe in true school choice. I knew that my parents could not just simply move out of our house in order to send us to a “better” school across town. As a proponent of school choice and a former employee of the system, my reader could argue that this kind of background will provide bias in any study relating to the topic.

In all transparency, my research topic combines all of the elements that make up my current identity. My focus is on gender, race, and leadership within a school choice context. The current demographics of superintendents/CEOs in traditional school districts and charters in Texas display a bleak outlook for women of color who aspire to fill that position. While the vast majority of teachers are females, the image of the glass ceiling is very real once you reach a certain position in school leadership. I imagine this environment as a sieve, wherein only very few women are afforded the opportunity to lead school districts. This is problematic given that approximately half of any typical student in body in Texas is female and a large majority of parents and students are Latino. Therefore, the ultimate decision-makers in schools are leaders who may neither adequately understand nor represent the majority of their constituency, resulting in what I perceive as a hegemonic system that may marginalize groups and contribute to the continued inequities instituted in our urban school districts.

Consequently, my positionality also stems from experiences I have had as a Latina administrator in a charter school for the past 13 years and just recently am now an administrator in a public school district. I was formerly employed by a Latino CEO with no superintendent certification or preparation. In my interactions with my male subordinates, I have been told to be less direct and much more subservient when I interact with these individuals. I understand that this transparency must be presented very explicitly in my research, and I understand that this represented my one circumstance. I am on a quest, though, to discover if my situation is unique to me and see if my female executive colleagues, who are also being pushed down by that glass ceiling, have had similar types of experiences.

Ethical considerations

Given the stated positionality as a Latina school administrator employed by a Texas traditional school district, it is important for me to consider the potential for bias as I collect and analyze data. Journaling and peer debriefing helped to ensure I accounted for bias throughout the data collection and analysis process. Lastly, given the personal experiences that were shared, the anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed through Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol was essential.

Reflections on methodologies

This research study was comprised of six Latina superintendents/CEOs in Texas. Therefore, the findings are not necessarily transferrable to other states. Additionally, this study may not be transferable to other superintendents and CEOs in Texas, even if the

district leaders are Latina and/or female. This study should be read for individual meaning in one's own context.

Trustworthiness

This study used strategies to promote the trustworthiness of the research findings. Peer debriefing were used to allow for a calibration of findings from a neutral, external party. Hays and Singh (2012) explained peer debriefing as assistive in the following way: “While they are supportive of the clinician or educator’s research efforts, they also serve as another vehicle to challenge the findings” (p. 211). This process served to enhance and confirm the researcher’s conclusions.

Participant checks were conducted after each interview and following the focus group meeting to include participants’ review of the transcribed interviews. This process illustrated a strategy used with participants to verify that the data analysis accurately represents their intended meanings. Guba and Lincoln (1989) described this strategy as an essential tool in establishing trustworthiness.

Triangulation

Sources of data were triangulated for analysis. A semi-structured interview, focus group recordings, documents, field notes, and reflective journals were triangulated to ensure the accuracy of findings. This triangulation also allowed for cross-referencing. Additionally, theoretical triangulation was also employed through the alignment of LatCrit and new institutionalism theory. The use of multiple theories lent credibility to the researcher in order interpret and support data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

SIGNIFICANCE

This research came at a pivotal time during which significant policy changes were (and still are) changing our educational landscape and current long-standing practices. Search firms and school boards may be limiting themselves in terms of candidates given the competencies and functions valued implicitly in their documents and interview questions. Given robust preparation of the functions of a school leader, the adoption of an asset-based lens could potentially view Latinas as a viable option for collaborative efforts with community and stakeholders as well as implement a solid curricular program to positively affect student performance. Additional training can be enhanced to improve the managerial and skill competencies of the superintendency. Lessons learned from the Latina CEOs could assist traditional superintendents to gain a business-oriented lens of the superintendency domains. The implications of new policies waiving the superintendent certificate may also force Latina superintendents to remain competitive as an emphasis on the competitive marketplace could further subjugate the traditional superintendency if nothing changes in the realm of preparation. Jabbar et al. (2016) contend that given the factors of relaxed standards for charter leaders and preference for aggressive skills sets favored in market economies, women of color who aspire to the superintendency will experience further marginalization. Therefore, in a state of this size with policy and political context which favors privatization, the applicability of this study to aspiring superintendents is significant.

Finally, my goal for this study was to distill lessons learned that might inform a future generation of women leaders. In a wider context implications from this research

can potentially inform the selection practices of school boards in terms of how leadership is defined in both contexts of traditional public school districts and charter schools.

Lastly, preparation programs can better equip its students to take the context into account to be better prepared to navigate the superintendency domain.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the ascent of Latina superintendents in Texas and compare the experiences of traditional superintendents and charter school CEOs as the popularity and increased number of charter schools and superintendent licensing standards have been relaxed. The career paths and descriptions of Latina superintendents and CEOs were analyzed using interviews of experiences leading to the superintendency. This study was based on the following research questions:

1. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, how do their career path experiences compare and contrast?
 - a. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their ascent?
 - b. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their role as superintendents?
2. For Latina district leaders, what kinds of professional support systems, such as mentoring, have they experienced in their careers?

Chapter three described the methods and procedures used to ascertain Latina public and charter school CEO and superintendents' perceptions of their gender and ethnicity in their ascent to the superintendency and differences between the two sectors of leadership in public schooling. This chapter presents the findings collected from the study. This instrumental case study used a combination of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, a reflective journal, and thick, rich descriptions. I begin with three

major findings I derived from this study: (1) The concept of mentorship is largely absent among the study participants. Desirable traits found among effective leaders and encountered in the ascent are synthesized and mimicked, conclusive with existing literature. (2) Competencies for Latina superintendents vary according to context. Superintendents in the traditional public school realm are anchored in curriculum and instruction while charter school leaders largely specialized in operations competencies. Preparation and experiences needed in ascent are key to the appointment and perseverance of the superintendency. Study participants experienced challenges in the political competencies as related to governance. (3) While there may be a seemingly easier ascent in the charter school arena given lesser restrictions, Latinas who successfully ascended to the superintendency in both sectors experienced some semblance of marginalization in regards to their ethnicity and/or gender.

This chapter details the ascent experiences, competencies, and strategies each Latina employed to attain the elusive superintendency in both public and charter school districts. It describes the common themes of the Latinas' pathways but also differentiates the experiences of the two sectors. My aim was to capture the perceptions of these distinct experiences and present findings on the implications of the treatment of Latina superintendent candidates. Section one provides background information on each of the study participants, using pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of all participants. Participant narrative is presented in section two that is organized based on themes that emerged formed from the research questions. The final section provides a summary of the findings.

The study included Latina superintendents and CEOs serving Texas public and charter school systems during the 2014-2016 academic years. Due to the limited number of Latina superintendents in Texas, study participants totaled seven superintendents with four traditional participants and three charter school representatives.

Participant Background

All of the traditional public school superintendents served predominantly Hispanic school districts. Two of the three charter school CEOs also served majority Hispanic school districts.

The sample participants were selected based on criteria as presented in Chapter 3. These women were selected from a limited group of Latina public school superintendents and CEOs in Texas. Using the database of superintendents in Texas potential participants were initially identified. In order to maintain confidentiality of such a small identifiable group the inclusion of extensive details will be omitted. Additionally, years of experience are represented as a range classified as 1-4, 5-10, 11-15, and 16-20. Regions are labeled with an identifier comprised of letters A-D, illustrating the study participants represented various regions of the state. Out of the initial group of participants, six Latina superintendents were selected to ensure representative regional diversity as well as gauging initial interest from the study participants. However, after sound issues on an interview transcript effected transcription for a traditional superintendent, an additional participant was contacted through snowball sampling and was used to replace the original participant. This superintendent selected to replace the initial participant met the same criteria for the study and agreed to participate. Ultimately, two participants were

superintendents from the region labeled C and two were charter leaders in small sized districts in regions D and B. One participant serves as a superintendent in region A. The sixth study participant recently served a small, rural school district and was serving as an interim superintendent in a mid-sized district in region B. One of the region D superintendents leads a large-sized school district spanning several regions of Texas.

Included below is a table of key participant characteristics and background description for each participant, with a pseudonym assigned to each. The narratives are intended to provide the reader a background from which to better understand and situate the study participants in their individual contexts.

Table 3: Participant Characteristics

Superintendent	Context	Region	Superintendent Experience
Dr. Gabriella Martinez	Traditional	C	16 -20 years
Dr. Alicia Estrada	Traditional	B	5-10 years
Dr. Brenda Jimenez	Traditional	A	1-4 years
Selena Jaramillo	Charter	D	1-4 years
Georgina Valle	Charter	C	16-20 years
Dr. Charlene Macias	Charter	B	5-10 years

Superintendent Gabriella Martinez

Superintendent Martinez is currently in the fifteen through twenty year range as the district leader. She describes herself as a longtime educator with her initial goal of aspiring to the superintendency fulfilled. Her beginnings included work in the social services field. Shortly after this experience she went back to school and received her certification as a teacher, attaining her Master's and Doctoral degrees. Her ascent began in the classroom but she was promoted quickly. This included program coordinator, principal, and an assistant superintendent, all within the same large school district. Part of this time included higher education experience shortly before ascending into the superintendency.

Her interest in becoming a superintendent stemmed from her competency in curriculum and instruction and the impact she felt she could make in student performance. She also felt like it was important to serve as a role model for young women who aspire to administrative positions. She credited her own parents for her success and focus on education as being the great equalizer, having instilled this in her at a very early age. Her husband and children have been extremely supportive and inspired her to realize her goals in the superintendency.

Dr. Martinez believed she was selected by the school board given her ability to expand partnerships within the community. Under her leadership, she felt that she has pushed her district forward. She strives to be a role model to women who aspire to leadership roles due to the barriers that exist for Latinas, particularly in her regional area where opportunities for Latinas are limited.

Superintendent Alicia Estrada

Superintendent Alicia Estrada embarked on a traditional route towards the superintendency. She was born and raised in Mexico and came to the United States at a young age. Dr. Estrada began her career as a classroom teacher for nine years, worked as a principal for a short time, and then held district level curriculum positions. . Subsequently, she became the assistant superintendent for personnel and instruction and a superintendent. Dr. Estrada's first superintendency was in a small rural district before taking a hiatus to complete her doctoral degree. Dr. Estrada then went on to a superintendency in a small rural district in Texas. After political struggles, Dr. Estrada took an interim superintendent position in a mid-sized district in an urban area of Texas.

Because of Dr. Estrada's background, she gravitated towards districts that served Latino students and English language learners. She utilized her strengths in curriculum and instruction and operations to influence her work with students and educators within the districts she served.

Superintendent Brenda Jimenez

Superintendent Jimenez has worked for two school districts her entire career. Her trajectory to the superintendency was traditional in nature, beginning in a large school district in an urban center. She began teaching, then became an assistant principal, principal, director, executive director and, finally, moved into the superintendency in a small, rural district. Her ascent was largely inspired by her predecessor, who encouraged her to follow her dream of becoming a superintendent.

One of three daughters growing up in a border town in Texas, she faced adversity and doubt within the school system. Her mother encouraged her to persevere and instilled in her the importance of education. Therefore, her impetus has been to create learning environments where all students can thrive. She contended her focus is on students first and although the job is extremely challenging, it is the engagement with students that makes it so rewarding.

Superintendent/CEO Selena Jaramillo

Selena Jaramillo is superintendent/CEO of a charter district. She serves the community in which she was raised and credits her grandfather's social activism for her zeal to honor that legacy of public service. This service began with her time spent in community activism during college. She had no intention of pursuing a career in education but found herself filling time working for an education non-profit, embracing her non-traditional route to the superintendency. She was later tapped to run the non-profit organization, learning about educational policy and access for the ten years of the grant period. She was later called to use her program management experience to assist in the development of the new charter school. She later became enamored with the students she served and replaced the CEO/superintendent-principal, first as an interim and now in her fourth year as the permanent CEO/superintendent.

Superintendent Georgina Valle

Superintendent Georgina Valle is the superintendent of a larger charter school network spanning several regions of Texas. Prior to serving as a charter school executive, she was a classroom teacher in a mid-size, traditional school district, a frustrating

experience that she claims led her to the charter school industry. She first served as the school director beginning with one school of less than 200 students. Today, the district has grown exponentially, serving over 20,000 students to date. Her role encompasses managing the organization's senior management, executive directors and administrators, tending to all things instructional. Ms. Valle received an advanced degree in educational leadership but has not pursued the superintendency certificate or doctoral degree.

Ms. Valle was a first generation Latina college graduate and serves the community in which she was raised. This spurred her to emphasize the importance of education and inspire others to overcome the barriers that are put in front of them in order to shatter the statistics. She feels it has been her role to develop and cultivate good leaders that has led her district to success, committed to the mission and vision of the organization.

Superintendent Charlene Macias

Originally from a large city in the north Texas, Dr. Charlene Macias is a superintendent at a charter school. After obtaining her Bachelor's degree she became a teacher at a large school district in an urban center. After ten years of teaching Dr. Macias enrolled in a principalship program and received her Master's degree in educational administration. As a requirement of the program she completed a one-year internship in administration under an associate superintendent in a large school district overseeing 75 schools. Subsequently, she was recruited to assist with the opening of a charter school.

Upon the successful launch, Charlene Macias received her doctoral degree absent a superintendency certification or formal preparation, and was named the superintendent of the charter district. Dr. Macias became the school's executive director early in her career. Thus, she views herself as a role model for young women. Dr. Macias is currently in the one to four year range in the capacity of superintendent. She also leads a group of charter campuses throughout the state.

Ascent Characteristics

During the study, a major theme emerged as Latina superintendents described their pathways towards the superintendency. Traditional candidates embarked on a very traditional path, beginning as a teacher and then advancing through administration ranks until preparing for the district leader job as an assistant superintendent position. This was illustrated in the manner that Dr. Brenda Jimenez succinctly described her ascent:

So I've only worked in two school districts, where I was at and where I am currently. I think this is pretty odd...in the sense that there are still a lot of people that go from district to district... I started teaching... and then became the assistant principal, principal, director, executive director, and my last role as the superintendent.

Her traditional superintendent colleague also had the conventional trajectory found to be commonplace in a public school district, given the requirements of the superintendency certificate and experience found to be essential. This path was linear in nature and began as a classroom teacher, moved into a form of instructional leadership, developed into an administrative role, and finally plateaued at the central office level. It was in these rare cases that the assistant superintendent crossed over into the role of the superintendency

for an aspiring Latina superintendent. Dr. Martinez described her individual ascent into the superintendency, illustrating this traditional pathway:

Well, I was classroom teacher for nine years before going into administration and I worked as a principal for a very short period of time when I was promoted to director of special programs, then director of curriculum and instruction and the those two jobs were collapsed into one, so I was the director of curriculum and instruction in a 4A district in west Texas. Then I was promoted to assistant superintendent for personnel and instruction.

In a similar manner, traditional Latina superintendents seemed to always aspire to become a superintendent. All three public school district participants expressed their desire to become a superintendent was decided upon early in their career as Dr. Jimenez describes:

I always had it in the back of my mind that this is something that I wanted to do. The work that I did specifically with HR when I was an assistant superintendent for human resources, it was just the love of working with people. It's like putting a big puzzle piece together it's like a million little pieces is the best way I can describe the job, and then trying to fit everything all together.

While Dr. Martinez had the desire to be a superintendent and realized the positive impact she could potentially make, self-doubt was still a prevalent theme in her ascent. Yet, she persisted because she held this intrinsic motivation to make a difference in the lives of students. This thought of making positive change became the anchor to persist:

My goal has always been to aspire to the superintendency but you know it was kind of a lofty goal and I really was not sure if I really wanted to do that. I kept seeing in the positions I was at how powerful the position is in terms of making a difference. I wanted to be a superintendent so I could really put into practice everything that I believed in, everything that I had learned. I felt like I was very prepared in curriculum and instruction and wanted to make an impact in student performance. It's just peaked my interest and I just kept thinking. I want to do this, I want to do this for that reason, I want to make a difference.

However, the charter school superintendents did not share this affinity for this position early on in their career as Selena Jaramillo explained. Yet, the similar theme of taking on the complex role of the superintendent and learning on-the-job was worth the struggle in order to produce positive outcomes for students, even in the charter context:

I tell the kids the story all the time but you know, I went into the Peace Corps thinking that I was going to come back and be a forensic anthropologist. I got a call from a friend of mine that worked with (a prominent company) at the time, she said hey- the (prominent company) fund wants to start a school here in San Antonio but they need a program manager to like get it off the ground and see what happens... And it was a one year contract, this is what I was going to do. Maybe I would go back to school, be a forensic anthropologist, one day, and I fell in love with the kids, I fell in love with the process. And I met these really incredibly precious 14 year little old children. I like knowing what is happening with the kids, helping to make decisions, important decisions at the school – that’s part of what led me to it. I can do this I can run this nonprofit like a nonprofit and then throw education into the mix and how does it become a better school... So I didn’t go the traditional route of being a superintendent, okay so I’m going to do this and I’m going to teach for a little bit, then I’m going to get my masters and go into a principal program, none of that fell into my scope because this wasn’t the way it was supposed to go (laughs). So this is not the traditional route, but it just happens to be my route.

Even as Dr. Macias prepared to attain her Principalship, she contended that she did not aspire to the superintendency and still does have a career goal to teach at the university level. Much like Ms. Jaramillo, serendipitous events occurred wherein someone along her path prompted her to take the job and opportunity presented itself:

You know, I’ve never wanted to be a superintendent, never. And I think about this all the time, because it’s hard. You know, what really led me down this path and was just circumstances, doors opened and people said hey – you would really be good at this job, you’re a really strong leader, we really want you. And I said okay, I can give this a shot. No, I really just wanted to be a professor, just a teacher and eventually a professor... and I still want that for myself but it was just really doors opening.. I never really chose this, it kind of chose me.

In these instances a unique opportunity afforded themselves to the charter study participants. Persons of influence recognized the potential within them and they walked into the doors that opened for them. These Latina superintendents did not have the traditional pathway of the ascent characteristics of their charter counterparts but their competence was seen as an asset to their organizations. While some were hesitant emerging leaders, who doubted their own ability to accomplish the goals of the job, they all – traditional and charter – exhibited the intrinsic motivation to improve educational outcomes for students.

Latina Identity

The participants in this study were selected because of their identification as a Latina superintendent. Yet, the ways in which the participants perceived their ethnic identity contrasted given the arena. In the public realm, identity was rejected and resulting in an identity-blindness. Even in asserting that her identity is not pronounced, Dr. Brenda Jimenez continually questioned herself in her responses, perhaps displaying the ways in which this identification to ethnicity must be hidden in order to assimilate into the larger majority of the White male culture that dominates the position she holds:

I don't look at myself differently because I am Latina. I really can't say I do that differently or if I do it's not knowing that I'm doing it differently. Does that make sense? And I don't think that people, people don't make me feel that way. And I think that that's the reason? My situation is truly different.

Dr. Estrada was even more forthright in her assertion that she was not cognizant of her ethnicity and argued that because she had been raised in a homogenous community of

Hispanics, she does not recognize herself as different in terms of this characteristic when she is surrounded by her colleagues:

I was born and raised in Mexico and I came to the United States at 14. It was – there was no excuses if you wanted to get ahead you needed to work hard. Where I came from we were all the same. I wasn't competing with Anglos or Chinese or African Americas. I just did it because I wanted to do it. Being a Latina in Texas to me it wasn't a deficit. I always knew I had something else to offer and that was what I inculcated in my kids. When I'm in a room with other superintendents I never thought – Oh I'm a Latina. No, I'm a superintendent. Or when I'm in a room with principals I'm not thinking I'm a Latina principal. No –I'm an educator. I hadn't thought about it until you asked me.

This sentiment was again echoed by a traditional superintendent colleague Dr. Jimenez, “I don't look at myself differently because I am Latina,” and adds that her advice for an aspiring Latina administrator would not be any different for a person of any other ethnicity. Yet, she clearly illustrated two hurtful, poignant examples of discriminatory experiences in schooling based on her ethnicity describing an incident where her high school counselor told her she would never go to college and again where a college professor critiqued her writing style given her knowledge of her native language.

In the charter realm, however, the sentiment around being a Latina differed and was instead worn as a badge of honor juxtaposed with her feelings of uneasiness and of not belonging, both in terms of her appearance and educational background. While outwardly she asserts her confidence, there were tremendous feelings of self-doubt that did not permit her to truly belong:

I walked into the superintendent's meeting I think the first time and I have tattoos and I'm young, and I really don't give a shit of what people think. I walked in and it was kind of this very weird feeling first of all, there are not a lot of us...and to sit at that same table with men and women that have all this tremendous

educational background I think was a little intimidating. ... You know I always feel like it's a little bit harder being a Latina... You know, I don't wear suits every day, I'm as creative as these kids are when it comes to my dress or wear super high heels or jewelry, and I continue to get tattoos. You know, those are things that speak to me as a Latina. Those are things that speak to me as a woman that I don't feel like I have to conform to but I know that people are always slightly taken aback that I am who I am, in that term.

Yet, context still dictated an interesting dissonance, uncertainty, and an inner dialogue around identity for Georgina Valle that is rooted in her context. There was a focus on appearances as both superintendents speak about being in a room where they do not fit in based on looks alone. Ms. Valle took it a step further to assert herself despite the superficial differences and instincts to passively participate with a silenced voice:

I don't know how I perceive my role. I think I'm very cognizant of the fact that there are not a lot of people that look like me. When there are meetings or conferences or other things happening and I'm in the room. When it's local and I'm in the room I'm one of the few females and I'm very cognizant of that. When I am in the national space, even before I realize that I'm one of the few women in the space, I definitely realize that I'm one of the few Latinos in the space. I think that the majority of folks that are leading school systems are white men. The majority of folks leading charters management organization are tall, bald headed white men. ...I'm a Latina and I think that we are just quieter. And we are not as brazen. And we are not as up front. As much as I try to operate that way, it is a conscious effort on my part to be that way that's not conventional--- and people would be probably shocked to know that, but I have to say that I'm gonna walk into that room and I'm gonna sit down at that table number to say something or no one's calling on me and I don't need to raise my hand, I just need to speak. But it is so easy, I think it is our natural inclination, not to speak, to be quiet, not to speak not to be brazen and that's just my opinion.

While the superintendents expressed the confidence needed to succeed in their role, it became evident that maintaining this confidence themselves was a struggle and something these Latina superintendents had to cognitively insert into their interactions

with others. Aside from the feelings of not belonging, these superintendents struggled with the natural order of how things are supposed to be in terms of the structural sexism that is prominent in their lives. Ms. Valle expounded upon her professional context of defaulting to her cultural norms of submissiveness while Dr. Macias detailed an example from her personal life. In a powerful discourse on her Latina identity, Dr. Macias described an incident with her mother-in law and the sense that there is a norm that she definitely does not adhere to. There was an awareness that the choice to become a superintendent was the exception and not the rule in South Texas:

The ultimate Hispanic female is a wife, a mother, goes to church every day, raises kids. You can be a teacher or a nurse, that's okay... Our culture is changing as more women like me are in powerful position and making differences in the lives of children. My mother-in-law, my husband's Hispanic too-- sat me down and said – be careful, you are going to have your PhD and are a superintendent and your husband, my boy, doesn't have advanced degrees. I'm like, what do you mean I need to be careful? You know, you don't want him to feel bad. He doesn't feel bad, and I was lucky because my husband doesn't. He's proud of me, but my family still had that kind of idea that a Hispanic female needs to be a wife, a mother and we have to support the church. You know we can have jobs but our jobs are – we can be a teacher or we can be a nurse- you know, those kinds of jobs where we are taking care of people.

The positions that these women hold were out of the norm and were not acceptable in the circles where they work or in the comfort of their familial units. This was due to their ethnic identity and how they are supposed to act and who they are supposed to be. The superintendent was the antithesis of the acceptable role they were supposed to take on in our society. They were supposed to be quiet caretakers who were supposed to be submissive and care for others, including their husbands, not multimillion-dollar organizations. This was important because this way of thinking was not only pervasive

in the self-doubt that manifests itself in the daily interaction at work and at home for these two women, but it undermines the representation that should be occurring for the school children and families they represent.

Gender

As noted in the example above, ethnicity and gender became intertwined at times for the participants. The subject of gender was also perceived similarly to ethnicity by the study participants. However, I have included gender as a subsection of ethnicity due to the refusal for several of the traditional superintendents to recognize their Latina ethnicity as a factor or rather, viewed their Latina identity as a non-factor. Instead, they cited their gender as the reason they were forced to begin to assimilate into the “good ole boy” culture dominant in Texas school districts. In this example, Dr. Estrada described her need to learn more about football in order to begin to relate to her stakeholders and colleagues, yet what is illustrated was this need to assimilate into the larger culture in order to sit at the table and be inserted into the conversation that is dominated by a masculine context:

I have been in situations, especially in west Texas where gender is an issue. .. I had to learn to speak their language meaning football. ...These guys are ignoring me. So I thought I am going to see what this football is all about. So I started going to football games. ...So whenever I went to the meetings with other superintendents, I knew what they were talking about. And we would talk about football. It sounds kind of cheesy now but that was one way to get in the conversation. If I hadn't done that, would that have made me feel less capable? No, it was just an avenue that happened. I don't think my gender has hindered me. On the contrary, I take care of business.

By contrast, Dr. Martinez provided her perception of her gender as the requirement to be better than her male colleagues in order to be perceived as adequate. She also asserted that in order to ascend to the superintendency as a Latina, an advanced degree is a necessity:

I hate to say this but somebody mentioned this to me and it's very true: you have to do what a man can do, but only better and in heels. So, I think in so far as skills and talent, the academic preparation. That you make sure you equip yourself, particularly for Latina women is a doctorate. And then, you know, the interpersonal skills. No matter how good you are, how smart you are, the ability to work well with people, it's crucial.

Yet, do the interpersonal relationships at the superintendent level revolve around sports and locker room banter as indicated by Dr. Estrada in order to truly experience a sense of belonging? Does the knowledge of masculine subject matter supersede the obvious nature of gender? In this context where football (and sports) reign, it seemed knowledge of masculine subject matter was important in order to exist in the realm of the superintendency. In an even more direct statement about gender, Superintendent Jaramillo contended that even superficially, superintendents are not supposed to look like her:

These are traditional roles that, you don't find people that look like me, that look like us. So, I think that just by that very definition we are overlooked because you don't see a lot of us, the traditional look is the white male...who is coming in to save the district, or is coming in to fix something...it doesn't exactly look like us.

The example cited by Superintendent Valle is perfectly exemplified in the circumstance of Superintendent Valle. When outsiders looked for the decision-maker between the two individuals, the propensity was to gravitate to the white male, as if he was the more

powerful of the two individuals because of his race and gender. Superintendent Valle shared the co-founder position with a white male and they have both ascended at the same time and in a similar manner. Yet, she was keenly aware that external stakeholders would rather address him due to a perception that he was the more powerful or competent partner purely because he was a white male:

You know the other founder is male and he's a white male and so I think that a lot of people will go to him rather than coming to me because he's a man and because he's a white male specifically. I think internally folks come to me, but externally they typically look for him and prefer to talk to him and prefer to deal with him and I think that that's because they just automatically assume that, he is the ultimate and final decision maker and a lot of times he does a good job about saying let's ask Georgina, you have got to ask go to ask Georgina. And I'm pretty good at inserting myself as well.

She continued to say that even though she understood this reality given the obvious differences in treatment based on ethnicity and gender, she made it a point to be forward and refused to comply as a submissive participant with those who attempt to subjugate her:

You have to be really forward. And what I mean by that is when you're they are not asking you, still answer, when you are the ultimate decision-maker. When they are not inviting you to sit at the table, you need to take a seat at the table because you know that's where you belong you know, we joked before that, we had board members say like, "Hey, can you grab me a cup of coffee?" and I'll be like, "No, I can't but someone else can?" You know just little things that they would never quite ask another man to do. So I think the biggest thing is being forward and being confident and who you are and if people start noticing you because you're a woman, make sure you get noticed in the right way.

Dr. Macias contended that the treatment she received, reinforcing what was described in the above example with Ms. Valle, was explicit prejudice. In this narrative she described

her male colleagues who brushed her off, recognizing that her gender, age, and ethnicity were all causes for discrimination, even after years of proven experience:

It's not just stereotypes, it's flat out prejudices (laughs). It's flat out. I'll go into superintendents meetings and I'll be one of two girls, or women and the only Hispanic woman, and it's intimidating.... So I am a leader but when I am amongst my colleagues who are leaders, and who are all men, they usually are the ones taking charge. But I feel finally, like, within the last year, not only have I felt more confident in just being a leader among my colleagues, but they felt more confident allowing me to or more comfortable allowing me to, because it is always been – oh she's just a girl, or oh she's just young. Oh she's just Hispanic and she surely doesn't know what she's doing or you know I need to tell her how she needs to run. There have been some meetings where I still feel that way, where I feel talked down to, or patted on the head, like just listened to and patted on the head, like okay, okay. But I feel more inclined to call it out and be aggressive. With that being said, I feel like because I worked under strong Latina women in my career, that's really helped me.

This powerful response brings together the dynamics that occurred in the psyche of a Latina district leader when seated among her colleagues. While she admitted that her confidence has gradually increased, there were these moments of feeling inadequate because there was this association with not only being a woman, but a young woman who is also Latina. This intersectionality of identity caused her to feel that her ideas and what she had to offer at the table was not valued. Yet, while there was agreement that others could make these women feel less than, Superintendent Valle also argued that women placed themselves in lesser positions by settling for less because they were cognizant of the adversity that was present in the upper echelons of school leadership. This, for her, is an ongoing internal battle to remind herself of the need to speak out:

I don't think that we lean in enough. I think we take ourselves off the market before we are even given the opportunity. I think that a lot of times they think that, "I can do this assistant superintendent for instruction and I'm good, and I'm

comfortable and I can do this and be a good mom and a good wife at the same time. Instead, if I became a superintendent I wouldn't be able to balance it all.” That's a bet they make. That's a narrative that they tell themselves without even trying. It's like well try it first before you decide you can't do it. You know, so I think that a lot of that they take themselves out of the equation as well. And then internalize it. I have to tell myself I have to speak up. I can't be quiet. I have to speak up.

Even in the traditional realm, Dr. Martinez exemplified what Superintendent Valle called out above as limiting themselves, taking themselves out of the equation by turning down offers due to the negative internal dialogue that exists:

I held back. As a matter fact I applied for several positions and actually got one, but it going to be so far away that I decided not to take it. I think it was my own lack of self-confidence really that was the driving factor there. I think looking back now, I don't think that because looking back now I have established good relationships with the other superintendents in this region. But it was, for a while, I felt like I had to be better do better, so it did make an impact. I think it's always at the forefront of someone's mind because we're women and women don't usually hold these positions.

Inclusion

The study participants spoke at length about feelings of belonging in the highly stratified realm of the superintendency. The Latina superintendents had much trepidation about being in the same room as the obvious minority while the Latina charter school superintendents felt cast aside by ethnicity, gender, and their status as a charter school representative. This section describes the perceptions they felt their colleagues held and illustrates the discomfort the superintendent's possessed.

Moreover, taking a seat at the table in a local context was difficult for Superintendent Jaramillo. She continually felt questioned due to her nontraditional route and believed that because she did not belong, her skills were inconsequential:

I think it was a little bit difficult for me, I think there was an assumption, a stereotype that I absolutely didn't know what I was doing because I didn't go the formal route. I think in charter schools there's a good ole boys club so if you didn't fit into that, if they hadn't known you for years, it was kind of like who are you, we can't really trust you with things can you really do this job kind of stuff or, is this a just a joke you know, are you playing around you know?

This statement came from a charter Superintendent Jaramillo, which echoed the sentiment of Dr. Macias wherein their participation at this level was perceived as a joke given their identity. For Georgina Valle, she pointed to a larger context that views the Latina culture negatively. Yet, this toxic context even included environments where policy met the state's decision-makers:

Once you're in Austin at the capital, once you are in DC and you're talking to people in the space that's where it becomes really evident ... our cultural habits in norms can be seen as deficit.

Even in the smaller contextual realm of the education service center, exclusivity existed among superintendents according to Ms. Valle that created a further chasm between district leaders:

The Educational Service Center for example, has a superintendent cohort, and they meet regularly--informally on their own. Those are things that I'm not invited to because of the lack of certificate per se, but it's not really a table I want to be at.

These current practices exercised by the regional service center served to reinforce the disdain for the two groups, traditional and charter. Due to the negative feelings associated with the exclusion experienced from an organization that is meant to support educators, the study participant who would seemingly have so much to offer at this table, had written this group off as exclusive to traditional members.

Mentorship

The topic of mentorship reiterated the need for the Latina superintendents to synthesize the traits of various individuals encountered along the pathway due to lack of an inadequate professional network. Two of the study participants worked for a superintendent in their ascent who acted as their mentor in terms of providing professional guidance and support. Both of the mentors were Hispanic women and provided the inspiration, experiences, and sponsorship the study participants attributed to success as a superintendent. They also spoke of the on-the-job-training that was not present in their preparation programs that was afforded to them by their mentors. On the subject of mentoring, Dr. Jimenez deviated from the existing literature and described a powerful mentor that motivated and inspired her to become a superintendent:

During my time there, I had an amazing opportunity to work for female superintendent... She was amazing just amazing. It was really her that inspired me to do this. But when I met her and had the opportunity to work with her. Gosh, it was just such an amazing and such a good learning experience that that's really I guess you would kind of say sealed the deal. It was definitely (her) in regards to her ability to make me feel that my opinion matters. I was definitely...she had this gift to encourage people...People working so hard because we didn't want to let her down, she really worked on building capacity working alongside of her, learning. So she definitely is one of the best mentors I've had.

Dr. Estrada also pointed to her membership in the state's organizational cohort that provided her with assistance and support, allowing her to access a mentor for any questions she had:

Well back then it was a requirement that you had to have a mentor – a positional mentor. And I had a wonderful mentor and I still stay in touch with them. I had a mentor and anytime I had doubts I would just ask them...and when I received my first superintendency TASA had its first superintendents' academy and that cohort was pretty tight...but once you are behind the desk it's you're it.

However, Dr. Martinez was forced to seek out several mentors who could assist her.

Again she felt she could ask questions of these individuals but nothing existed for her unique needs as a Latina:

I really I hooked up with colleagues that happen to be superintendents. At the time, when I was coming in it was mostly men. But I felt like I needed to find out what the job was like, what the position was like, and what it entailed so I really sought out people in that role. ...So it really help me get an insider's view. I don't think that we have good mentoring for Latinas aspiring unless they take their own initiative.

Dr. Macias illustrated the synthesis of persons who exemplified desirable traits to help her in specific areas. She created these informal networks along the way and these individuals each lent their advice to her in these short-term relationships. Yet, these mentors were not superintendents and could not provide the knowledge of this complicated job, thereby impairing the preparation needed for the position:

I never had a mentor ...in my CEO position I had my CEO that I worked under but once she was gone, she was gone. So really I had to create my own mentors ...the dean of the College of Ed was my mentor, the chair of the board was my mentor - so I would call and have lunch with them, but I really can't speak to [formal mentor programs] because I've never used them. I've never had a formal mentor. My mentors were people that I sought out and not necessarily had

superintendency experience even, but they had political experience and university experience and because I am sitting in that I needed that as well if that makes sense. There were things I needed that other people had experienced that helped me through things.

Unlike Dr. Macias, Ms. Valle was forthright about not having a mentor for guidance and stated that a mentor program was not something she was even aware of and was relegated to calling the service center for assistance. While Dr. Macias did cite mentors in other arenas, Ms. Valle was forced to follow other Latinas and emulate their leadership styles from a distance:

I didn't have any and I don't know of any that are out there and maybe it's because I'm an unconventional Superintendent with a charter school. But I bet if you talk to other charter school superintendents - you can get help if you need help get help by going to the Texas education agency or get help by going to the regional service center but even when I was working on my Masters and other things like that I've never been aware of a mentoring program. They've never offered a mentoring program. I never seen a mentoring program to sign up for. They are pretty non-existent. That's not to say that no one helped us. Obviously we've gotten a lot of help. Pick up the phone and ask for help and guidance and people are willing to help always but no one in a more formal mentoring role. It's not someone that I know like badass Latinas I know and say, "I want to be like that when I grow up." I followed them around for a little while and look carefully at them and their leadership, what they're doing when they are in a room but not in a formal mentoring program. No.

In contrast Dr. Macias received a tremendous experience and received on-the-job training, working directly alongside of an assistant superintendent to help lead a large district. She felt as if this direct mentoring was priceless:

I did everything from substituting for principals when they were ill or needed to go on leave to doing second appraisals to doing discipline hearings to doing employment hearings. You name it I did it. I was her assistant, I helped which was an immense help for me, that where I feel like I got all of my training to be a superintendent. I don't have formal schooling of superintendency but during my

principalship program I was an assistant to a Superintendent. That was my on-the-job training. I felt like, in a huge school district, running 75 schools. While I wasn't the superintendent I was her right hand and acted as the superintendent in many, many meetings. It felt like that experience has led me to be very successful in my position here, in what I'm doing now.

Dr. Macias had tremendous on-the-job-training given her lack of academic preparation as a superintendent. Superintendent Jaramillo also had no superintendent preparation but shared that her non-educational mentor helped propel her forward early on in her career. This influential person pushed her beyond her limits, yet she lamented that a more formal mentoring program had not been available. This, for her, led to isolation:

I had a wonderful, wonderful mentor...who taught me how to be a really hard worker and taught me how to think on my feet. ...You know, so I became really good at being an operations person, at being able to look at the strategic plan of an organization and see what's working and what's not working, how to make decisions on the fly, to look at financials and see where we're at so. That kind of background work and really just management really prepared me to step into this job. It was an informal... He kind of helped to oversee the program, the day-to-day overseeing of the program. ... He just kind of took me under his wing. I have yet to find a good formal mentoring program. I've always just been very fortunate that I have run into people who I have really admired and I have liked their working style and have used that as an opportunity to bounce things off them but I haven't entered into any formal mentoring. And when I moved into this position it was kind of like I was alone. I was, I don't know, I just kind of did the best that I could.

The Latina superintendents relied heavily on the assistance of these informal mentors who could offer nuggets of transferrable information but lacked the specific expertise of the superintendency. There was obviously no safety in asking their circles of colleagues for assistance so they had to resort to taking the initiative to find this in others. This coping strategy, however, led to isolation in the job and fear of impropriety when

they thought of befriending a male colleague. Yet, there was a commonality among participants' motivation and desire to help aspiring Latinas and the students that they serve that allowed them to continue to move forward despite these internal conflicts that exist. The Latina superintendents spoke about their intentions to help those in their communities, particularly young women. All study participants worked in predominantly low socioeconomic, Hispanic school districts and expressed their desire to alter the trajectory of their students' lives, positively influencing student achievement in their respective districts.

Networks

Even more expansive than a mentor was the formation of a group where superintendents felt they belonged. These networks had the potential to inform its members and provide a safe place for posing questions. These professional communities not only promoted further learning and gathering of information, they were instrumental in the establishment of connections between the members. One participant, Dr. Estrada, did note that it was a Latino who assisted her and others as they sought out assistance early in her career to build their network, "There was one person in West Texas that was a Hispanic male superintendent and he was very open to help us. Whenever we need assistance he would introduce us to other people. So the network opened up." Yet, the presence of a supportive network has been a struggle for the study participants, particularly for the charter school superintendent Dr. Macias. She expressed her dismay with the service center practice of separating public traditional superintendent meetings from the charter school group:

They used to separate the superintendent traditional [school district] group, traditional superintendent group, and then they'd have a single charter school group at the [educational service center] ... and they don't do that anymore and it was because I caused a little ruckus. I was like, "Look, we do everything a regular school district does. I'm not sure why you separate us. We need to be together in these trainings." So they do the trainings together with the other superintendents. But we still do have, at (the educational service center), a superintendent charter school group, that focuses just on some of the issues that we face that charter schools are unique as well. So I have those two groups to support me on an ongoing daily basis.

This change in practice was only modified when the superintendent took the initiative to confidently demand that these exclusionary meetings include the charter school leaders as well. Because the preparation and competencies of these leaders were limited, it was even more crucial that these organizations helped to build the capacity of these district leaders by placing them in a context where these individuals can help one another.

Competencies

As described in Chapter 2, the superintendent's roles and responsibilities are expansive. The responsibilities of the superintendency is extremely complex. The traditional superintendents attained advanced degrees and progressed from beginnings to teacher into principalships, to central office positions, and finally broke through to the superintendency. Two out of the three superintendents in the charter school arena began as teachers, however, one study participant went from teacher to co-founder/superintendent, eliminating the mid-management positions. The other charter school superintendent was hand-picked by her predecessor to lead the school district while the remaining study participant entered the organizations from non-profit programming to operations director. She was placed in the superintendency position upon

the departure of the former principal/superintendent on a temporary basis, but later progressed to a permanent position after an absence of qualified candidates.

Strengths

With the superintendency role encompassing the distinct competencies, it was incumbent upon these district leaders to realize their strengths and note any commonalities in the study participants that led to the selection to the superintendency. The assets these superintendents brought forth to their districts varied with their context. In the traditional context, curriculum and instruction was a clear strength among the study participants. However, Dr. Estrada noted that she understood that a solid understanding of several superintendent competencies are essential to being an effective school leader:

Definitely my strength is curriculum and instruction and systems work. And I finally understand what it meant to the district from a systems perspective to understand that HR [human resources] is supposed to be working in tandem with technology with curriculum with making sure the business office is taking care of business.

Study participant Dr. Brenda Jimenez cited her experience as an assistant superintendent in the one specific competency of human resources as the area she tends to focus on the most due to her experience in ascent:

For me, it's the human resource part of it because that's been my background. That's where I spent the majority of the time. So in the human resource part of it, specifically in the retention of quality teachers, working on the staff development that allows teachers to really be able to swim.

This emphasis and internal drive to make a difference in building the capacity of their teaching staff to improve the status of their schools is a common theme for the

superintendents. While she cited curriculum and instruction as a clear area of strength, Dr. Martinez also recognized her ability to communicate effectively with all stakeholder groups attributed to her ability to ultimately impact student success:

I felt like I was very prepared in curriculum and instruction and wanted to make an impact in student performance. It's just peaked my interest in I just kept thinking. I want to do this, I want to do this for that reason, I want to make a difference, particularly in the area of curriculum and instruction and I did and it's worked very well for me...I feel like it's so important that we communicate well with all of our stakeholders-- our parents, our students, our staff. I have been told, and I feel like I do a pretty good job of keeping people informed in terms of soliciting feedback, ideas from everybody.

As a contrast to their traditional superintendent counterparts, the charter school leaders deviated outside of the competencies to describe their strengths. Superintendent Valle discussed her impact on the development of campus leaders as the element that pushes her district forward:

I think that one of the things that I've done really well and one of the things idea does really well is just really develop our principals to be good leaders. And inherently believe teachers and students and families come to our schools and they stay at our schools because of good leaders.

Superintendent Jaramillo noted that her operational expertise led her to run the organization in a much different way had she possessed a traditional background:

You know my, I look at my background, which is not the traditional route, I do think that one of the best things it did, it taught me about organizing. It taught me about how to run businesses, it taught me how to run nonprofits. So I had this kind of overarching general idea about what I think can work, would work, what have I seen work, how to be a good boss, how to be a good leader, what does that look like and so I think in some ways that not following the traditional route has really opened up and allowed me to do this job a lot differently then I think other people would have done this job.

She continues to assert that operations and finance are assets she brought to the job, “Operations and finance are absolutely my two strengths. I love operations and I love looking at what works, what doesn’t work, how to change it, giving people chances like, hey I can do this, expanding on things. Finance I’m really good at.”

Continuing in this same vein was charter superintendent Dr. Macias. She argued that she was confident in her abilities in operations and combined communication and human resources competencies to effectively manage the organization:

My strengths are communication, definitely, and I really know how to manage teams. I manage so - operations. I know how to hire, really managerial, and communication I know how to hire the right people I know how to create this team, create this vision in my organization and a focus in my organization. So I take key results that I want to see every year and I know how to have people operationalize those key results.

On the whole, traditional superintendent competencies were centered around curriculum and instruction and human resources. The assistant superintendent positions they held encompassed these competencies and allowed them to become proficient in these areas before taking the role of the superintendent. The charter school superintendents utilized competencies aligned to the business aspects of the organization to include operations, yet extended the competencies to management strategies to include the supervision and development of teams and campus leaders. All three charter school superintendents were directly involved in the opening of their school districts.

Challenges

The research question was posed: For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their ascent? In the traditional

realm, the superintendents were challenged in the areas of business and finance, technology, and politics in relation to the governance competency. In contrast, two of the three charter school superintendents found their greatest challenges in the curriculum and instruction competency. This was mentioned by the study participants in relation to the absence of teaching experience in their ascent. They relied on their cabinet members to make-up up for deficiencies in this area, which also lent itself to their self-identified strengths of their abilities to put together effective teams. For two of the superintendents, the competency of finance was identified as a challenge. Dr. Jimenez struggled with not being equipped with the knowledge of the state's complex financial system to positively impact her school district, "Just sometimes not having enough knowledge in regards to the tax rate, and how all that is calculated the IMO and the ISF side you it's all those different components of it."

Superintendent Valle, who co-founded her charter school as a classroom teacher noted that finance was the least exhilarating aspect of the job:

I don't know that it's necessarily a challenge, but it...the thing that's the least exciting about the work is the finance and just how cumbersome finances is in schools--coding and having a budget including everything to the right line item. ... It's never fun and it's not something that's exciting and it's not something I would want to say I am good at.

In opposition to the strengths of the traditional public school study participants, Superintendent Jaramillo lamented the curriculum and instruction competency as her biggest deficit. She noted that she attempts to attain more knowledge in this area and surrounded herself with colleagues who bring strengths in this competency:

Curriculum and instruction. It kills me over and over to not be as strong in curriculum and instruction so I read books and I attend workshops. You know at this point I look back and I just accept...It kills me that I can't be more of a help in that area... At this point, though, when I think about school or going back to school, I think what, I'm going to go from a superintendent to a teacher? That doesn't work so I kind of just accept that that's not going to be a strength so what I do is surround myself with people that really have strengths in those areas, and rely on them to help me, build a better school that way. I don't have to know everything, it doesn't have to be something. I have to let go of the fact that I wasn't going to know everything. I just have to let it go.

Politics, finance, and explicit bias were the overwhelming challenges of the sitting superintendents. Particularly with traditional superintendents, the challenge of school board relations surfaced with an emphasis of the perception of school board members as related to their gender and ethnicity. They stated that since the composition of the school board was predominantly male, there was an element of prejudice that seemingly existed and served as an undercurrent to the challenges that existed between the superintendent and governmental body. Additionally, five out of six of the study participants cited finance as a competency they struggled with the most.

Overwhelmingly, all study participants spoke to the unequal treatment attributed to gender. Traditional study participants did not attribute prejudice attitudes to ethnicity, but focused on gender. Charter school superintendents intertwined both ethnicity and gender when articulating problematic incidents and examples that affected both their ascent and practice. While traditional superintendents spoke of their identities as Latinas, two of the three study participants suppressed their ethnicity in relation to their role as a superintendent. This also held true when study participants faced each other to openly discuss their Latina identity. In contrast, all charter school superintendents resisted

suppression and the denial of their ethnicity by amplifying their cultural identity. There was an anger and rebelliousness present as they spoke of refusing to hide who they were for the sake of pacifying others, yet feelings of uneasiness were prominent when surrounded by their male colleagues.

Politics and the School Board

As the study participants shared their struggles and discussed barriers once they took on the job of superintendent, school board governance and politics came to the forefront. Yet, Dr. Jimenez was in the minority as she sang the praises of her school board members. “I have a board that is an amazing group of board members. We really work well together and do not micro-manage so we have a really good professional working relationship.”

Dr. Estrada shared her feelings of inadequacy and lack of preparation to successfully navigate the political relationships with the school board members. She stated that the inability to work positively with the board negatively impacted the work she could have accomplished with the school district:

I think one of the most difficult things I had to learn from all of the districts I was in, from superintendents to interim is the political aspect of working with board members. I am a pretty good listener and I’m pretty likeable and what you see is what you get but I wasn’t prepared to deal with hidden agendas.

For study participant Dr. Martinez, she attributed the struggles between aspiring Latina superintendents and board members as fundamentally a gender issue paired with lack of education at the school board level:

I think a lot of our board members since they do the interviews are still mostly men. And in this region, we have a lot of men who don't have a whole lot of formal education and I see and I still, I believe that they feel like they can't relate well to women for some reason...It is still very much of a man's world in terms of the superintendency and in terms of board members. So I think they think probably haven't progressed...For some men, we are still threatening. And that is sad, in this day and age, it is very sad.

Dr. Martinez continued to illustrate this assertion with an example of a question she was asked in an interview:

I remember...one of the board members in the interview questions asked me if I had the stamina enough to take the position and I thought, he wouldn't have said this to a man! I think that other board members thought it was kind of funny – he shouldn't be asking that question. And I chuckle to myself, because he's no longer on the board. But would you be asking that of a man? Probably not?

This nervous laughter hid an experience that was so poignant, she recalled this question years later.

During the course of the discussion on the selection process conducted by school boards, Superintendent Valle shared that traditional public school boards or their designees have never approached her as a potential applicant for the superintendency or on a consultative basis given the results of her schools in the charter arena:

I mean [we have] really great results. We are serving 37,000 kids and we have pretty damn good results. Not only as a charter but in district comparison right? I've never had a district pick up the phone and call and say like, "Hey? What are you doing? We want to learn from you." I've never had a board pick up the phone and say "Hey, we have a superintendency vacancy...you guys are doing amazing work. Would you consider applying?" I've never had a headhunter pick up the phone and call and source me - in terms of a traditional district, I don't know what they look for. It happens, a lot in the CMO space. If there is a charter management organization that are looking for a CEO you know, I'm getting an email. And I'm getting the requests and people are asking for me to apply but that's not the case in terms of traditional districts.

Given the way in which charters are viewed, as competitors that take the traditional tax dollars away by luring their brightest students with bigger and better promises such as college for all, there was an antagonistic relationship that has been developed between the two contexts that may explain the absence of recruitment across the two organizations. Dr. Macias preferred the charter school board selection structure and viewed the school board-superintendent relationship as much more strained in the traditional public school context due to the political nature of elected board members:

I think the political piece is much harder in a traditional superintendency job because your board is all elected and at a charter school the board is not really elected. That political piece and pushing your agendas through a board that is all appointed and not elected is really, really hard. I think all of your actions are out in the open. Even though the charter schools actions are out in the open too – we follow the sunshine laws as well as any other districts. I think that the political lens, that political piece is much, much, much harder in a traditional school district. And really getting to move your district in a certain direction takes a lot more finesse in a traditional district through that political lens than at a charter school.

Even withstanding the perception of the charter school being an easier relationship to navigate through, Superintendent Jaramillo suggested that the school board did not view her as qualified to take the job of superintendent due to her lack of a traditional educational experience:

I think they were looking for not me. And I don't think that, I think now that if you would ask them they would say oh she's amazing. But I think that in the beginning they did not like that I did not have a formal educational background. I didn't have a formal ascent to what they deemed to be such a high position. Like I didn't have all this, I wasn't a teacher... I wasn't in the trenches, so I think that they absolutely were not looking for somebody like me.

Even after the Latina superintendent was selected, the superintendent retrospectively questions and reflects on the justification for selection. There still remains this aspect of self-doubt and lack of confidence that inhabited the psyches of the Latina superintendent. Dr. Jimenez made an assertion on the unfortunate impact of gender and the resistance to be the first in their region to break the mold. Further compounding the issue was the absence of female representation at the board level:

I want to say I want to say that because they truly weren't the best candidate in my perfect little comfortable utopia world. I want to say that it's because people hired truly the best candidate and they weren't. In my real world. I want to say it's because that it's still a good Ole Boy System. It's not what you know, but who you know. I guess all I can think of is that for board members I think of board members that really take their responsibilities of board members really seriously. I think that some of them are still, under the notion that not many school districts have hired female superintendents so: a) They are fearful as to why that is, so they think maybe we shouldn't, maybe a female can't, you know, handle it. I really think that a lot of it lies with the board. And when you think about it, also of the seven board members that I have only one is a female. Oh, it really starts from there in the sense that even board members- there is not a lot and my old board and the previous board that I worked with the minority was still the female. There were not a lot of female board members that I worked with, so I think that right there alone is part of the issue.

There are serious implications for the recruitment and selection of Latina superintendents if the demographics and paradigms held by the elected officials of the board continue to be stagnant and non-progressive in nature. Since Texas is comprised of many rural areas this nature of representation may be the component that continues to stratify this position so starkly.

Comparing and Contrasting Superintendents and CEOs Perceptions

In order to address the differences in the research question surrounding experiences, the study participants were given the opportunity to discuss the perceptions of their colleagues in traditional and charter realms. In the individual interviews traditional Latina superintendents were indifferent to their charter counterparts. Comments made were negative in nature, noting the belief in public schools and critiquing the business models of this other schooling option. Charter school superintendents were very aware of the traditional superintendent and felt they would not have ascended to the superintendency in this arena due to a variety of factors. They felt that there was a system built upon whom you know in the standard progression of promotion. They also mentioned that they embraced their identity while traditional superintendents denied this part of their self. The traditional superintendents were succinct yet sharp in their responses regarding their charter school counterparts as evident in Dr. Jimenez's statement, "Well, the thing is I believe in public education. I'm a product of public education."

Dr. Estrada remained indifferent, yet opposed to the charter school movement even while acknowledging a lack of information regarding these schools of choice, "I don't have a lot of experience with charter schools. I don't think there is much difference. I don't know that I would be interested in the charter school. It's my personal opinion that I don't agree with the whole movement behind it."

Dr. Martinez provided more justification in her response to the tenants of charter schools. She used the knowledge of the charter schools in her region in particular to

articulate her distaste of the business model and cited the lack of participation as a barrier to the relations between the two school types:

You know, I really don't know. I know that the charter school, some of the charter schools in this area are based on the business model, so they are very focused on results. I truly believe that we are in the people business, the student business so I feel that I may have a different take. I don't know, I don't have the relationships with the charter school CEOs. I know they don't come to many of our meetings at the regional level, although they are invited.

Conversely, Superintendent Valle is critical of the public school board decisions, lauding her board for being focused on academic results rather than personnel and facilities, for example. She argued this should comprise the majority of school board priorities:

I think that our board of directors looks to our CEO to make sure that we're in good standing. I think they look to me as the superintendent to make sure that we are in good academic standing, which is what I think boards should do. I think too often public school boards are focused on the hiring and firing of the district and the building and the operations and the finance. They should be more concerned with achievement and how kids are doing and how kids are doing in every school in every classroom and I appreciate that we keep our board focused on that.

Moreover, charter school leaders were emphatic that they would not have been afforded the opportunity to lead a school district in the public school realm. Superintendent Jaramillo described the usual trajectory of an educator who aspires to the superintendency position, one of which she described as few and far between:

So my experience is completely different. I think that with the traditional school district its, you go in, you go through the paces, you're the teacher, then maybe you are the vice principal, and then you get shuffled between schools, and then you move on to the principalship and then you do the formal education, then you kind of work your way up. To hopefully being a superintendent but there is not a ton of those jobs so somebody would really have to, somebody has to die or resign and then there is an opportunity to move up and then you just hope you are in somebody's realm to be considered for that but I think that my experience is so

different because I was able to come with a very nontraditional background and still be able to do this job and still be given an opportunity to do this job. And so, I think that if I were in the traditional route, I wouldn't be in schools at all.

In an even more direct statement, Superintendent Valle doubted that she would ever be considered for the superintendent position had she not moved into the charter system: "If there were no such things as charters, I'd still be teaching fourth grade. Probably by choice and because I really believe it's who you know in the space, in a traditional public school." Given the statistics on the number of Latinas who successfully ascend and the assimilation behaviors prevalent in the traditional context, Superintendent Valle's assertion may be accurate.

Sameness

In an interesting convergence of the regional superintendents, there were similarities in experience and thoughts that existed between the study participants when they sat face-to-face during the focus group interview, particularly around policy. Dr. Jimenez expounded on her answer that echoes the value of experience not only for district leaders but for those who make decisions for students:

If I can only speak for myself bothers me where we have people that are either the commissioners or other people making rules and laws for us that have never once spent time in the classroom, have never once taught. Have never once was a building administrator or anything like that, but they're quick to tell him how to do it and went to do it and that we're doing it wrong. To me that's pretty frustrating.

Superintendent Jaramillo added that she felt the lawmaker's lack of understanding stemming from their upbringing can lead to this misalignment stating, "They have privilege our students don't, and their mind frames are coming from a place of privilege."

Both superintendents also spoke of sexism in the context of challenging the formation of mentoring relationships. Dr. Jimenez felt particularly affected by this given the small, rural area she must navigate relationships within:

So when you befriend just, professionally, because you need help or whatever and it happens to be a male, people are quick to say, oh well you know, something is going on. Are they having an affair? But if two men here walk out of here and go have lunch or whatever you know it's no big deal.

While Superintendent Jaramillo agreed with the existence of sexism in terms of the perception of relationships, she added that she often was mistaken for the subordinate when she was in the presence of her colleagues:

I think there is a level of sexism that certainly exists. I think that that absolutely happens. I think that what happens with us is that if I go with my vice principal somewhere they assume he's the superintendent and I'll be like – no that would be me.

Finally, there was clear consensus that the meetings held to bring superintendents together really further divided them. The study participants referred quite negatively to the monthly regional service center meetings that join both public traditional and charter superintendents. Dr. Jimenez boldly stated the obvious during the face-to-face focus meeting:

None of us really talk to each another. You get the information you get the handouts and then you leave. Not a lot of really sharing ideas like I'm doing this and it worked at least for me and maybe it's myself because I haven't lent myself.

But it's also a room full of 80% who are men. This group to me it's just--this is my fourth year-- it hasn't lent itself to build relationships. I feel that it's almost like they almost pit public traditional schools and other charter schools against each other. I wouldn't blame you for feeling weird to come and talk to me because it's kind of like were fighting for our own kids.

In response, Superintendent Jaramillo fervently agreed to this confession:

Yes, exactly! I do think that there is a divide or fear that we are going to take this tremendous amount of kids from public schools. But I think that that fear would exist. And I can see it from the other perspective. If I was a traditional superintendent I too, would be like, "Girl with your charter school, with your little art charter school, you're annoying." And so I get it. But I think it makes it even harder for me to find a traditional mentor in this capacity.

Charter school study participants not only felt cast aside among charter school leaders, they also perceived an isolation from their traditional counterparts. One study participant demanded inclusion of charter representatives at the educational service center meetings. Another charter superintendent commented that they were not invited to these meetings as well, yet indicated it was a table she did not want to sit at regardless, perhaps indicative of the result of this exclusivism practiced. She extended this separatist environment to the advertisement of open positions and the sharing of proven results between her successful charter district and public school districts. She wondered why, with the success she had achieved, traditional public school districts were not interested the development of a shared practice in order to positively affect student achievement.

However, it was during the focus group interview, that the study participants revealed that they felt that the regional service center meeting served to further divide them into the two camps of public versus charter. The notion of stealing students to

threaten the financial viability of a school district paired with the inexperience of outsiders who failed to put in the work of their counterparts led to this tension between the two camps. They noted that the meeting is constructed to disseminate information and did not aid to foster relationships between the district leaders. There was a sense that if they reached out to their mostly male counterparts, there would be a perception of pursuing illicit affairs.

Motivation to Persevere

Despite the challenges that existed as a Latina superintendent in Texas, there were still many positive elements of the job that inspired these women to contend with the obstacles placed on them. This intrinsic motivation for each of the study participants were grounded in the students they served. Superintendent Valle described her moral imperative as her driving force:

I'm a first generation Latina college graduate and I think that really helps in the community and in the call to action for our organization, and for teachers, and for our leaders. I am from the community in which I'm serving. And I have brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews that look like your family as well. And I and my family look like your family as well. We have only the best intentions that we want for our communities, right?

Dr. Macias also viewed her job as an opportunity to make a difference for all students and as the impetus for her work:

The social justice lens where we are really doing work to promote all children, not just certain children and why, why we are doing this work. When we are placed in situations in leadership positions and we can make a difference using this social justice lens is really important.

Dr. Jimenez noted that while the superintendency was just as rewarding as it is difficult:

You know it's certainly one of the hardest jobs that I have ever had. I just also want to say that it's certainly extremely rewarding. I think that in general, there's just a lot of people that are thinking twice about the superintendency. But there is still certainly a lot of positive things about the job.

These women also noted the implications for their work as promoting opportunities for all women. In many cases, the participants stressed the importance of education from their vantage point and as the great equalizer for the communities they served:

I start telling my family and my extended family and say that you know the mother's level of education predicts her kid's level of education. Then they are like really? I then I'm like yes – so we need to have our mothers, our daughters, our wives need to be educated because that means good things for all of our kids, and all of our families. I see myself as a role model for everyone, not just girls, and not just Hispanic girls. Hispanics, blacks, everyone because I see myself as a role model assuring that I do my very best all the time.

While these women may not have had the mentors they needed as they ascended, they certainly realized that they can now be mentors for young women who aspired to the superintendency. Dr. Martinez viewed her position as one that other women can look to for encouragement and motivation:

I feel like it's important to serve as a role model for girls for young women that aspire to these types of positions. So I think it's important to me to have taken this journey and have gotten to this point in life because I feel like at this point in time I can give back. And I think it's real important for young girls particularly to have really good role models. People in these positions, like this one, superintendency or CEO or even a principalship that can see that woman can do anything that men can do. I think it's really enabled me to be very proud of who I am and what I have to give.

Dr. Estrada described her need to represent those students who grew up much like herself. In the end, her aim was to serve students who were typically marginalized:

Having the desire to make things better for students, especially in the district where there were Latino kids and there was no representation other than an assistant principal here. Even the number of teachers were not where they needed to be. I always gravitate towards districts that are in trouble meaning the districts that are low performing consequently serving Latino kids – serving English language learners. I gravitate to those districts because I have an affinity to those kids. I didn't know it. I was an at risk kid when I came to this country. I didn't speak English and everybody was poor. Everyone around me was the same. Making opportunities for these children to change their lives is my drive.

The drive of these Latina superintendents, despite the challenges to include discrimination, feelings of self-doubt, lack of sufficient preparation, and the absence of effective mentors, was the overriding motivation not only to aspire in the face of these adversities, but also to continue to serve in the position given the unwelcoming environment constructed for Latinas at this level. As teachers, serving English learners, Latina educators are in the highest demand across the state. Yet, when there is this ambition to serve all students at the district level and lead school districts, Latinas are out of order and have not yet been invited to this patriarchal table.

Summary

In summary, this chapter described some of the participant's experiences as a Latina superintendent in Texas. The data analysis provided insight to the participant's experiences through their perspectives of their ascent and competencies utilized as a current superintendent. The questions that guided this study were: 1. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, how do their career path experiences compare and contrast? 2. For Latina district leaders, what kinds of professional support systems, such as mentoring, have they experienced in their careers?

Based on my findings, there is a significant difference between the ascent experiences of Latina superintendents in traditional versus charter contexts. Traditional Latina superintendents begin as teachers and move their way up into administrative roles, gain experience at the district office level, and specializing in the curriculum and instruction competencies. These study participants sought out advanced degrees and took a superintendency position at districts comprised of majority Hispanic students. In contrast, Latina CEOs positions were varied, with two of three participants beginning their careers as teachers. Yet, there was an absence of formal preparation for the superintendency and mid-management experience for the charter counterparts. However, study participants, no matter the context, experienced the absence of mentors or a formalized network of support. There were supportive persons along the pathway who influenced the superintendents and inspired their practice. This led to uncertainty, self-doubt, and diminished the competencies in preparation for the role.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

It is a conscious effort on my part to be that way that's not conventional--- and people would be probably shocked to know that, but I have to say that I'm gonna walk into that room and I'm gonna sit down at that table to say something or no one's calling on me and I don't need to raise my hand, I just need to speak. But it is not so easy, I think it is our natural inclination, not to speak, to be quiet, not to speak, not to be brazen - and that's just my opinion.

-Georgina Valle

In this final chapter, I pull together several conclusions, reflect on methodologies, and provide some implications for future research.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This phenomenological study used a critical theorist paradigm to answer the following research questions. Overarching themes are outlined to present common characteristics present in regards to superintendent competencies, the ascent experiences that shaped each of the Latina superintendents, and their contextual influence as it relates to access and political implications.

These themes are presented in order to answer each of the following research questions.

1. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, how do their career path experiences compare and contrast?
 - a. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their ascent?
 - b. For Latina superintendents and CEOs, what superintendency leadership dimensions challenge them in their role as superintendents?

2. For Latina district leaders, what kinds of professional support systems, such as mentoring, have they experienced in their careers?

Every interview began with a sense of confidence in the responses of the superintendency participants, as they began with their ascent experiences – based mostly upon factual information. As the interviews continued and they were asked about their identities and experiences surrounding existing as one of the few Latina superintendents in the state, they began to let their guard down and open up, revealing painful and demeaning experiences. This is largely a subject that has not been explored with these superintendents as their need to assimilate has been to reject these differences or admit that these experiences exist.

Discussion and Implications

These Latina superintendents persisted despite barriers that were present in ascent in order to promote improved outcome for students. Discriminatory practices continued while in the position that caused feelings of self-doubt to permeate the psyche of these individuals despite the advanced education achieved and the position held. There were consistencies to the literature previously examined including the absence of effective mentorship structures (Caceres-Rodriguez, 2011; Munoz et al., 2014), inadequacy of preparation for the enormity of superintendency responsibilities (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014), and rampant discriminatory practices (Heilman and Eagly, 2008). Topics that aligned with existing studies with some deviation were questions around ethnic identity (Espinoza, 2010) and organizational assimilation (Scott, 1995). In terms of identity, some of the Latina superintendents verbalized their

struggles as Latinas residing in this uncharted territory of the superintendency. Others refuted the fact that their identity caused a difference in their treatment or practice, yet, the examples they cited often illustrated this intersectionality of gender and race. Given these salient findings in a time when legislative decision-making can potentially accelerate the growth of charter schools and ease certification requirements for the superintendency, it was crucial that these silenced voices of this marginalized group be heard. The implications of this study's finding are important for aspiring Latina superintendents to include teachers and administrators in our school system as well as to our communities at large who depend upon having quality educational institutions.

Mentorship

Of the six study participants, four superintendents, two traditional and two charter leaders identified one effective mentor who helped them to develop their competencies. However, these mentors were not a part of a formal mentor program. None of the study participants cited a professional organization as helpful to their ascent. Consistent with the literature, Caceres-Rodriguez (2011), the study participants sought out their own mentors along their pathways who they looked to for guidance, synthesizing features of these effective leaders to transfer into their own practice. This form of mentorship did not adequately address the challenges the superintendency posed, given the complexity of the job. Furthermore, these leaders who would seemingly make excellent candidates for promotion, resulting in sponsorship and recruitment to positively affect school districts, it became incumbent upon the individual to actively seek out the assistance of others in positions of power. In a sense, these women were left to succumb to males who yielded

influence in their professional circles, as an informal source of knowledge and role model of traits to assimilate to in order to gain a level of acceptance. This reiterates the Munoz et al. 2014 study that found less-developed mentor programs and a shortage of female role models at the highest levels as emblematic of the experience of the female leadership experience. Many of the women spoke of contacting these experienced male figures, hesitantly at first, for fear of bothering the person or asking a seemingly dumb question. Yet, there remains consensus that women in leadership do not have access to a professional mentor system.

Superintendent Preparation

As a further setback and accompanying the absence of an effective mentor program, the preparation the study participants received insufficiently readied them for the role of superintendent. Preparation has been cited as an important precursor to advancement and women have been willing to attain advanced degrees, including superintendency preparation, in order to be included in consideration for the district's top job (Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramvalho, Mills, & Simonssen, 2014). Consistent with the literature, three traditional superintendents and one of the charter study participants held doctoral degrees. Yet, the study participants were emphatic about their formal education as an inadequate form of preparation for their job (Levine, 2005).

Gender Discrimination

A common thread in the narrative of each of the study participant whether traditional or charter was discrimination based on gender. Many of the Latina superintendents spoke of instances where they were not recognized as the school leader

based on looks alone. There was a brazen example of a male colleague requesting coffee from the Latina superintendent. This treatment resulted in uneasiness and the continuous mental reminder to embrace their seats at the table. This balance of demeanor is referred to in the Heilman and Eagly (2008) study that found that women were caught in a no-win situation given the expected desirable traits for women such as niceness and warmth were not aligned with the necessary masculine traits a school leader should exhibit.

Participants echoed Martin's (2011) study in the higher education context that found gender discrimination had a negative impact even despite the progress made. This discrimination also led to slower paths to the attainment of leadership positions. This was indicative of the ascension paths of the Latina superintendents in the traditional sector. However, the charter Latina superintendents, on the whole, ascended at a faster rate and at a younger age than their traditional counterparts. The charter study participants also held higher levels of confidence and were cognizant of the discrimination that existed and that they were subject to on a regular basis. Traditional Latina superintendents refuted that fact that there were outright cases of discrimination yet cited examples that affirmed that discrimination did exist.

Kanter (1977) held that women in positions face uncomfortable scenarios that illustrate three sources identified as "social invisibility, boundary heightening, and performance pressures" (p. 238). These three tokenism processes were included as examples throughout the narratives of the study participants. Study participants felt like they were being patted on the head when they spoke out during meetings surrounded by other superintendents, they felt objectified and judged by their appearance, and they felt

they felt the need to obtain advanced degrees and assimilate in order to be deemed equal to their peers.

The women in the study spoke of the perceptions of the school boards that caused them to overlook quality candidates. One of the traditional study participants went so far as to ask the headhunters, who worked to gather applicants for the superintendency position, whether the school board was looking for a male or female. Aspiring Latina superintendents must be provided the opportunity to receive formalized training so as to become adequately prepared for the position and its challenges. The hiring practices must also address the implicit bias present within the system to promote ascension pathways for teaching and administrative corps who view the superintendency as a potential pathway. Latinas should be considered for these positions equally as their colleagues without having to work harder for the same consideration. Bobbit-Zeher's 2011 study as well as Munoz, Pankake, Murakami-Ramvalho, Mills, and Simonssen's (2014) study illustrates this example, which found superintendent female candidates are viewed first as women, then as superintendents. It was in these findings that the authors noted challenges that promoted negative gender stereotypes among candidates such as perceptions of incompetence by school boards. The Latina superintendents felt the political challenges posed by the school board were difficult to navigate, particularly in the traditional context where school board members were elected and deemed not as progressive as their charter school appointed board members. They also felt that they were not prepared for the pressure this particular aspect had on their experience.

Several of the study participants discussed their decision to hold the position as a superintendent as going against the status quo held by their communities and among their family members. They knew there was this acceptance around being a teacher, but moving into the upper echelons of the superintendency was something that was threatening to the family unit. They spoke of their husbands being supportive, despite the feelings of other family and community members. Brunner (2000) spoke of the perception stating that the social norm indicated it was “not natural” for women to become superintendents. In all school districts and charter schools in Texas, 76.6% of teachers are female (The Texas Education Agency, TEA, 2015), furthering the notion that a woman’s place is in the classroom, not in the boardroom.

Latina Ethnic Identity

Mendez-Morse (2004) found that the West Texas Latina school leaders in her study followed the traditional pathway but ultimately emerged as a school leader hesitantly, in order to make a difference in the predominantly Hispanic schools they served. While not all of the school leaders interviewed were hesitant, they were motivated to persevere given the larger impact they wanted to make, consistent with the Mendez-Morse study. Additionally, their intrinsic motivation to serve was framed in the often-negative experiences they themselves held as schoolchildren.

Yet, when the study participants were asked to discuss the impact their identity had on their work, there was a sharp contrast between the traditional superintendents and the charter executives. Traditional superintendents admitted that their gender may be a cause for differentiated treatment and the small numbers of women at the

superintendency level, they denied their ethnicity had an impact on their practice or subjugation among their colleagues, often citing the large numbers of Hispanic administrators, board members, and community members surrounding them. This immersion in their homogenous environments led to the traditional participants viewing their ethnic identity as a non-factor. In essence, this led to the veiling of the private Latina self which lent itself to silencing of the voices of the Latina superintendents as was the goal in the conceptual framework utilized.

LatCrit

While my goal in selecting LatCrit as a research theoretical framework was to unveil the silenced voices of my study participants (Yosso, Villalpando, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001), conquered by the White majority who seeks to marginalize these voices, it was quite surprising to begin interviews with seemingly confident, powerful women to find a counter-narrative vying to be told. The beginning of the interviews often began in a safe manner, with each study participant providing the facts of their ascent. Yet, as they began to reflect and become comfortable with the researcher, they shared experiences of feeling like they did not belong, among their male colleagues and with one another. Even while they spoke of the need for competence and confidence in order to ascend, they themselves indicated elevated levels of self-doubt when surrounded by their male colleagues and were forced to remind themselves that they were worthy of taking a seat at the table. There was a feeling of hyper-insecurity and the notion that they would be scorned for establishing professional relationships with their male counterparts if seeking a mentor relationship. When asked if they felt their male counterparts felt these

same trepidations, the response was quick: “Absolutely not!” Therefore, even when ethnicity is denied, there remains a clear intersectionality of a Latina’s identity representing traditional forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism, consistent with research (Simmons, Lewis, Larson, 2011). This is why it was highly critical that this form of counterstorytelling be brought forward so that the Latinas voices represented in this study could be heard (Yosso, Villalpando, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001, p. 94). This study served to make a specific contribution to the field of LatCrit by revealing the hegemonic structures and norms that are entrenched in this public and powerful role that inhibits candidate progression. These untold stories manifest themselves in a constant internalization of self-doubt and are prevalent in both traditional and charter contexts given the organizations are subject to similar policies and external pressures.

New Institutional Theory

While the charter movement began as a campaign to innovate and provide an alternative to traditional schooling, there was a gradual movement to mimic the practices of traditional school districts in order to gain legitimacy. A component of this is charters and traditional public schools conforming to be more like one another even though they are in direct opposition to one another. In regional campaigns such as the aggressive “Go Public” traditional school advertisements and regional service centers actions of separation, there are subliminal messages that focus on segregating the two contexts and pitting them against one another. As an example, prior to the focus group interview the Latinas from separate contexts had never had one conversation with one another even

though they convene at the same superintendency meetings each month. Yet, the representation of Latina superintendents is consistent across the two contexts in terms of numbers and the treatment they receive from their male counterparts. This reiterates the nature of similar coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures of uniform organizational structures (Scott, 1995). Tensions continued to fester even as the two contexts become increasingly similar, partly explained by the fact that all schools are subject to similar policies as well, which may be a factor that is fostering an isomorphism between charters and traditional school districts.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) defined a characteristic of new institutional theory when organizations mimic its competitors to reduce uncertainty, an important goal of charters as they increase in number throughout the state. Yet, the leaders of these two organizations, who could potentially learn from one another, are kept apart. From the perspective of the Latina charter leaders, they are further marginalized and excluded from meetings, conferences, and forums at the regional and state levels. There is little crossover or interest from traditional school districts towards successful charter leaders that could lead to recruitment or learning opportunities to benefit both contexts. Mimicry, in this sense, is relegated to the negative aspects of schooling including the continuation of maintaining the status quo of who takes the seat of the district leader. Moreover, the traditional school districts, through the decision-making state board of education, are relaxing the requirements of the superintendency requirements, which could potentially open the doors for untraditional candidates, but is sadly closing the door for viable Latina candidates. By viewing this study through this lens, policy-makers must examine the

implications of their decisions which may very well limit opportunities for underrepresented superintendency candidates.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional qualitative studies regarding the school board, Superintendent/CEO relationship in traditional systems versus charter schools are warranted. Given the governance structures and differences between the two, the success of the district leader in an elected versus appointed board of trustees is worth more exploration. In several of the study participant perspectives, they felt that the traditional superintendent challenges were greater due to the elected governing body and their perceptions regarding the abilities of a female leader. Also, what causations may exist between the ethnic make-up of the school board have in terms of the selection of a school leader are unknown. Furthermore, there may be characteristics of a school board that influence the selection of a superintendent such as age, gender, and/or level of education.

Related to the governance aspect is the need for further examination of school board members' priorities regarding superintendent candidates. Furthermore, inquiry with an emphasis on educational programming as a priority for a school district may promote an increase in more diverse leadership representative of its teaching corps. Researchers should explore how school board priorities are shaped and what implications this has on their superintendent selection.

Also lacking in the literature is the study of charter school leadership in general. As a flourishing system at the state and national levels, and one that is highly controversial in educational discussions, there is a need to provide more transparency and

education for all stakeholders, particularly when making educational decisions for children and funneling public funding into these institutions. More specifically, stakeholders deserve to know, how does one become a charter school leader? The findings in this study suggest that there is a lack of a structured trajectory for charter school CEOs and if charters are to increase in numbers, the leaders can literally go from classroom to leader of a district in an instant. Therefore, does managerial experience elsewhere transfer to educational leadership and is this why this realm is still stratified? Also, how does the selection of the superintendent differ with an appointed school board versus an elected board of trustees?

Recommendations for Theory

When discussing the concept of Latina identity with the study participants, there was a clear distinction between embracing identity versus the rejection of identity between the two camps of superintendents. There was a significant difference between years of experience in education or the time spent in such a stratified organizational structure such as a school district. There is a need to explore the effects of existing in a suppressive organization to include the stripping of identity, which in turn, suppresses the non-dominant identity until the individual is convinced they are no longer different or that their differing characteristics are a non-factor. Perhaps, this can also be a coping mechanism, due to the gender stratification that exists in school districts, where there are large numbers of women in the lower echelons of the organization and mostly men at the executive levels. This may lead women to submit to being more like a man and less likely to stand out as an “other” in order to more fully belong in the club. The question may be,

at what point does the transition occur wherein the ethnic identity begins to erode given this type of environment? This exploration could add a more nuanced element of the deconstruction of identity to new institutional theory given its tenants of conformity towards the established culture.

There was also a psychological element that presented itself as an avenue for further research. Several of the participants acknowledged feelings of insecurity and self-doubt that surfaced when surrounded in a work environment by their male colleagues, the dominant group of decision-makers. Yet, these small numbers of women persisted given their motivation to improve their community utilizing their perception of the importance of education. They believed that they could and would make a difference in the lives of others and persisted. However, the existence of insecurity could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy where other non-traditional candidates themselves opt out of an ascension opportunity before it presents itself, especially given the absence of an internal motivator.

Recommendations for Practice

Given the pervasiveness of discrimination and extreme stratification in the field of the superintendency, there is a need for all stakeholders to speak out against misogynistic comments and directly addressing inequitable practices. Given Kanter's (1977) finding that emphasized the need for a minority group to build supportive alliances against divisive practices, the dominant group must not only stand up to become mentors for promising candidates who are women of color, they must also speak out against the sexist and discriminatory practices pervasive in this realm of leadership. There are several organizations that are composed of superintendents and conferences where all

stakeholders are in attendance. It is during these gatherings that attention must be paid to bring these issues to the forefront and equip these district leaders to advocate for their employees who have the potential to be aspiring superintendents. Findings from studies such as this must be shared in order to shed light on these issues related to the superintendency.

Going one step further, there remains the need to create a formal mentorship program for Latinas, one in which they can feel safe to ask questions. Due to limited numbers of Latina leaders, this will require males to become a willing mentor for these aspiring women. We can no longer leave women to navigate this misogynistic realm on their own, creating mentors from a patchwork of unmotivated, busy leaders. The mentors themselves need some guidance to assist their colleagues to successfully ascend, providing tangible opportunities for growth and development.

There also needs to be a truce made between the charter and traditional school districts. There are currently aggressive campaigns such as the Go Public campaign in the San Antonio area that serves to create antagonistic relationships between charter and public leaders. There is potential to build relationships between the two sectors that could potentially benefit both contexts. The regional service centers could become the conduit to bridge the two organizations, rather than separate further by building relationships and opportunities for dialogue between the two groups rather than holding separate meetings that promote competing agendas.

SUMMARY

In the review of the study, we must to look at these very powerful women on the outside, but see that beneath that façade they are hiding vulnerable private selves who are struggling to fit in and feel cast aside in many instances. Even in the slightest nuances of their speech, everything is qualified. There is this submissiveness in their voices and yet, an assertion that there remains this conscious effort to be more aggressive that they struggle to insert in their daily interactions with others. If the participants cite confidence as a characteristic one must have in order to exude success, the environment for these current superintendents must also be primed so that they can feel secure as well, as it relates to their ethnicity and gender. Yet the research of Heilman and Eagly (2008) found that traits associated with women included positive communal qualities such as niceness and warmth, and were considered inconsistent with typically masculine positions. Therefore, the leadership traits expected in leadership positions and found to be essential to the job of the superintendency as stated by the study participants are not the desired qualities deemed appropriate for a Latina by both organizational standards and expectations set by the culture of the communities they serve.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study that deserve consideration with respect to the current political landscape and a majority republican electorate whose views on school choice will result in a proliferation of more charter schools, not only in Texas, but in the nation. Charters would seemingly be an ideal arena for nontraditional candidates such as Latinas, but this does not seem to be the case. As Superintendent Valle argued, all Latinas in both realms must insert themselves into the space to make a

positive impact on school children that look like them, who grew up in much of the same circumstances as the children they serve and have overcome the odds themselves. There is a need to join these two contexts as the numbers of charter schools increase in the state. While there are differences in preparation and requirements, they share important similarities to include the types of communities they choose to serve, the emphasis on mentorship of young Latinas, their underlying motivation, and their past and current experiences of overcoming discrimination. In this model, competencies can potentially complement one another and these Latinas can serve as a group of support and mentorship. It is incumbent upon the regional service centers to provide the environment to develop positive relationships that could benefit both groups rather than further divide these leaders with very similar tasks given the isomorphism occurring between charter and traditional public schools.

Finally, the lack of formally appointed mentors and inadequate preparation for the job must be addressed if Latinas and other nontraditional candidates are to assume these roles of leadership to represent the very people that they serve. Mentors need not share the same gender or ethnicity of the aspiring superintendent. They must be willing to guide the experiences of promising candidates and provide sponsorship that leads to opportunities for viable applicants to showcase their competencies.

Our students deserve the very best there is to offer. While charter schools may seem like a viable alternate route for school leaders, and requirements of the traditional school district become more relaxed to resemble their charter school counterparts, Latinas aspiring to the superintendency and sitting in the seat of the school district leader will

continue to stall at these rates if we are not willing to make these changes to the routes to the superintendency and if charter schools strive to conform in order to retain legitimacy (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). Inherently, charters were meant to operate free from bureaucratic red tape in order to offer innovative practices and a different experience for those not satisfied with traditional schooling. Yet, charter schools must adopt some of the same practices as traditional forms of schooling in order to be deemed legitimate. One of these practices is the promotion and selection of the school leader. As Huerta and Zuckerman described, there was a dichotomy wherein the out-of-the-box practices of charter management must be balanced by “the rules, norms, and scripts of the more established and robust institutional environment that has come to define and dominate legitimate forms of schooling” (p. 415). It is clear that the experiences of both traditional and charter school leaders in terms of promotion, mentorship, and treatment span both realms. Not only are the numbers of Latina superintendents similarly small, the experiences of these women contain many common themes. Yet, the environment dictates and encourages a growing antagonism between the two types of school leaders, preventing the two sectors from coming together to mentor each other, learn from one another, and recruit from their ranks to promote promising school leaders. This context results in the cultivation of women working against one another to protect and foster inequitable pathways to leadership.

Appendices

Appendix A: Latina Superintendent Interview Protocol

Introduction: My name is Melissa Holguin and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. As partial fulfillment of the requirements of my doctoral program, I am conducting research on the lived experiences of current Latina superintendents and charter school CEOs in K - 12 Texas public and charter school district. Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study and providing me with your responses. One interview will be held for this research and a subsequent interview via a focus group will be needed. Today's interview will last approximately 60 minutes. As noted in the consent form, all information gathered today and in future interviews will be kept confidential. All identifying information will be changed to protect you. Please remember this interview is voluntary and the interview can be stopped at any time, upon your request. With your permission, I will tape record this interview session to ensure it is as accurate as possible. I can turn off the recorder at any time upon your request. Do you have any questions for me at this time? With your permission, I will begin the interview.

In order to gain insight into this topic, the following questions will be asked:

1. I would like to hear about your experiences that have led up to your current role as a superintendent. Tell me about your experiences before you applied for the superintendent position.
2. Tell me about the formal preparation you undertook when you decided you wanted to pursue the superintendency and whether you feel it was sufficiently prepared you or not.
3. Tell me about what led to your interest in becoming a superintendent.

4. How do you define yourself in terms of your Latina identity?
5. What are the skills and talents a Latina needs to possess in order to be successful as a superintendent?
6. In which ways has your cultural background influenced your journey towards the superintendency?
7. What would you describe as your strengths as a superintendent among the competencies – curriculum and instruction, finance, operations, communication, safety, technology?
8. What would you describe as your challenges to be as a superintendent among the competencies (listed in the previous question)?
9. What mentoring experiences did you have in your ascent to the superintendency? Do you feel current mentoring programs provide aspiring, as well as sitting Latina superintendents with the skills and tools necessary to successfully ascend to the superintendency?
10. How do you perceive the role of your gender and/or ethnicity when comes to obtaining a superintendency position?
11. What do you believe the district was looking for in their superintendent?
12. Why do you believe that some Latinas are overlooked for the superintendency?
13. How do you feel your experience in a traditional school district differs from being a superintendent/CEO at a charter school?

Appendix B: Charter School CEO Question Protocol

Introduction: My name is Melissa Holguin and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. As partial fulfillment of the requirements of my doctoral program, I am conducting research on the lived experiences of current Latina superintendents and charter school CEOs in K - 12 Texas public and charter school district. Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study and providing me with your responses. One interview will be held for this research and a subsequent interview via a focus group will be needed. Today's interview will last approximately 60 minutes. As noted in the consent form, all information gathered today and in future interviews will be kept confidential. All identifying information will be changed to protect you. Please remember this interview is voluntary and the interview can be stopped at any time, upon your request. With your permission, I will tape record this interview session to ensure it is as accurate as possible. I can turn off the recorder at any time upon your request. Do you have any questions for me at this time? With your permission, I will begin the interview.

In order to gain insight into this topic, the following questions will be asked:

1. I would like to hear about your experiences that have led up to your current role as a charter school CEO. Tell me about your experiences before you applied for the CEO position.
2. Tell me about your formal preparation you undertook when you decided you wanted to pursue the CEO position and whether you feel it was sufficiently prepared you or not.
3. Tell me about what led to your interest in becoming a CEO of a charter district.
4. What stereotypes have you experienced in terms of gender norms and expectations?

5. What are the skills and talents a Latina needs to possess in order to be successful as a CEO?
6. In which ways has your background provided for and/or limited your access into the realms of the superintendency?
7. What would you describe as your strengths as a CEO among the competencies – curriculum and instruction, finance, operations, communication, safety, technology?
8. What would you describe as your challenges to be as a CEO among the competencies (listed in the previous question)?
9. What mentoring experiences did you have in your ascent to the CEO position? Do you feel current mentoring programs provide aspiring, as well as sitting Latina CEOs with the skills and tools necessary to successfully ascend to the superintendency?
10. How do you perceive the role of your gender and/or ethnicity when comes to obtaining a CEO position?
11. What do you believe the district was looking for in their CEO?
12. Why do you believe that some Latinas are overlooked for the CEO position?
13. How do you feel your experience in charter schools differs from being a superintendent at a traditional school district?

Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

Study participants will be invited to participate in the focus group. The location will be conducive to the superintendents to honor the participants' limited availability.

Part one, Welcome:

I would like to welcome each you and thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Latina superintendents in Texas. A focus group is designed to allow the study participants to interact with one another and expand upon each of your responses. We will begin by introducing ourselves, providing only the following information: initials, current or retired superintendent, and whether you represent(ed) a charter or traditional school district. The information shared today is confidential. I will be audio recording this session today.

Part two, Questions:

1. What motivated each of you to accept the role of the superintendent/CEO?
2. What are your perceptions of the superintendent certification requirements of your respective school district types, traditional and charter?
3. How have mentors been influential in your ascension to the superintendency?
4. Looking back, what mechanisms would you access or construct in order to better prepare you for the position of superintendent/CEO?

5. How has your identity as a Latina impacted you in your role as a superintendent/CEO?

Part three, Closure:

I want to, again, thank you for your participation today. I will be transcribing the responses you have provided and will send you a copy of the transcription as an opportunity to review for accuracy. I will then analyze the data taken from the initial interview and this focus group to produce qualitative study findings. I provide you with a copy of the study upon completion.

Appendix D: Consent for Participants in Research

Study number: 2016-02-0059

Title: Latina Superintendents in Texas: Developing Leaders in a Climate of Change

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information regarding your decision to participate in this research study. The researcher will answer any follow-up questions you have. Please read the information below and ask questions before deciding whether or not to take part. This will be used to record your consent.

Purpose of the Study

You have been asked to participate in a research study about Latina superintendents and CEOs in the state of Texas.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in interviews
- Review transcribed data from the interviews
- Provide artifacts
- Explain data

This study will take two personal interviews, each with a 90-minute duration and will include approximately four study participants.

Your participation will be audiorecorded.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, findings can be further examined or replicated to enhance learning environments.

Do you have to participate?

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin in anyway.

If you would like to participate, please sign and send the original copy to the address provided.

You will receive a copy of this form.

Will there be any compensation?

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you participate in this research study?

Your privacy and the confidentiality of your data will be protected by using an alias, not disclosing any information to other participants, ensure details cannot be traced to participants, and all data will be locked in a secure location.

If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to you will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with you, or with your participation in any study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio and/or video recorded. Any audio and/or video recordings will be stored securely. Recordings will be kept for two years then erased.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, **Melissa Holguin**, at **210-788-7885** or send an email to **holguin@utexas.edu** for any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed.

NOTE: Only include this statement if the study is Expedited or Full Board:

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is 2016-02-0059.

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orisc@uts.cc.utexas.edu

Participation

If you agree to participate please sign the form and send the original copy to:

Melissa Holguin
9711 La Rue
San Antonio, Texas 78217

Signature

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

NOTE: Include the following if recording is optional:

_____ I agree to be [audio and/or video] recorded.
_____ I do not want to be [audio and/or video] recorded.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

~~~~~  
As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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